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Whispers of Hope: Urban Christ-Centered Education

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WHISPERS OF HOPE: URBAN CHRIST-CENTERED EDUCATION

by
Kristy A. Brown

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

In

Early Childhood Education

In the

Bagwell College of Education

Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, GA

2014

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Kristy A. Brown
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Acknowledgments

In memory of Michelle Wexler
Whose intense love for teaching endlessly inspires.
This dissertation is as much from her as to her.

Though many have supported this message of whispers and helped bring it from heart to page, One must be recognized over all others. Thank you, Jesus. Every sentence is for You. To my parents, thank you for believing in me, no matter what, and for always pushing me to chase my dreams. Thank you for taking care of me during every surgery. Through all of the pain, hesitation, and anxiety, you continued to give of yourself so I could finish this degree. I am so proud to call you my parents. Dr. Davis, thank you for not resting until I was able to put the whispers of my participants into words on a page. Thank you for believing in the message of this story, dreaming with me, and for your incredible patience with me as I grew as a writer. You have loved and supported me and given me a safe place to fail so I could grow. Anything good God might do in my life has its roots in you. Because of you, I have been challenged, stretched, and forever changed. Thank you for teaching me how to love and how to live with joy. You have been an instrument through which I have found myself. My thank you is far too small to express the gratitude that you deserve. This is a reality only because of you. What a precious gift from God that He put you in my life so I could complete this study. Thank you seems so insufficient, yet I humbly offer my deepest gratitude. I hope I make you proud. Dr. Warner and Dr. Coffey, thank you for pouring your time and hearts into this dissertation. I am so grateful to God for those He selected to whisper their stories, dreams, and regrets. I owe a tremendous amount of love to those who allowed me to share their whispers and

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Abstract

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the culture of an urban Christ-centered day school. The participants in the study included five administrators, fourteen teachers, five staff members, two board members, two donors, six parents, twelve students, and three alumni. The data collection process included 49 semi-structured interviews, 20 participant observations, and seven documents that were analyzed. By using a critical ethnographic lens, this study was able to identify how Freedom Academy integrated a Christian worldview, used the ethic of care, and implemented culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum. By combining these characteristics, Freedom Academy demonstrated their commitment to the spiritual and academic growth of their students and families. This study will help educate policymakers, urban schools, teacher preparation programs, and school districts about the importance of integrating care ethics and culturally relevant pedagogy into the classroom.

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CHAPTER 1

THE STUDY

There is no textbook response when it comes to fighting for social justice in education. God does not require perfection. We can go terrified. We can do it afraid. We can move unwillingly. We may certainly mess up, faithfully giving a voice to the whispers. Keeping their self-respect, dignity, and genuine worth is a complex road with many detours along the way. I have loved intensely, passionately, but inadequately during my time as a researcher. If you listen closely, my participants themselves have whispered about the unpleasantness of creating sustainable change in urban education. But just ahead of our doubt is the vision of what this country could look like if we all believed, championed, stood, obeyed, and gave a voice to the whispers (K. Brown, memo, June 1, 2014).

Introduction

The students of Freedom Academy (Pseudonym) attend a school where there are eager educators ready to teach. The building is clean, the grounds are well-kept, and the students seem to feel safe in their classrooms. Students at this school have a love for the Academy, a desire to learn, and high expectations for themselves. The mission of Freedom Academy is based on scripture from the Bible: “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (Holy Bible: New International Version, Proverbs.14.31). The mission of Freedom Academy “exists to advance the Kingdom of God by providing the funding necessary to offer students of Freedom Academy an excellent, Christ-centered education regardless of their families’ economic status” (*Annual Report*, 2013). As a result of the Academy’s mission statement, students have the opportunity to earn an education with a Christian worldview. A Christian worldview supports what Jesus called the Great Commandment. In the Bible Christians are told to love God with their entire hearts, minds, and souls. In other words,

Christ is referring to complete devotion to God with every piece of our bodies (Dockery, 2009). Harris (2004) believed that the purpose of Christian education is not to make students religious believers, but to teach students how to think in Christian categories. The Academy provides a Christ-centered education for students who come from urban areas and situations in which growing up may be challenging. Freedom Academy is designed for urban children whose families believe in Christ-centered education, but who do not have access, either financially or geographically, to Christ-centered schools. Students who attend Freedom Academy are prepared to use Christ-like thinking and succeed as students of character and spiritual believers.

Learning how to think in Christian categories or to use Christ-like thinking (Dockery, 2009; Harris, 2004) supports the vision of Freedom Academy. By preparing students to live out the Great Commandment and to see the world through the lens of Christianity, students will be empowered to “utilize their gifts and resources for the Kingdom of God and in turn help others in their communities” (*Annual Report*, 2013). Since 1997, every student at Freedom Academy has received a high-quality education that instills hard work, community service, and the pure joy of learning. The opportunity to attend Freedom Academy opens many doors for future students. For example, since Freedom Academy only goes up to the 8th grade, the president and board members seek out donations from individuals, businesses, and scholarships from prestigious Christian schools. With the help of donors and scholarships, the students from Freedom Academy might have the opportunity to attend one of these high schools. By bringing in guest speakers from local high schools and taking field trips to colleges, Freedom Academy is instilling hard work and giving the community hope that, regardless of race or economic

status, they too can have the same opportunities as children who live in suburban communities.

For the purpose of my research, I constructed this study as a qualitative ethnographic case study; I gathered data by participating in the lives of the students, faculty, staff, board members, and parents of Freedom Academy. I used interviews, observations, and the collection of documents to produce data for this research. The purpose of this research was to explore the culture of Freedom Academy and to understand the background of an urban Christ-centered day school.

Background

Freedom Academy is located in the Southeastern United States. The school prides itself on offering a quality, Christ-centered education to inner-city students. The school enrollment consists of Pre-K-to 8th grade with a class size of 12-to15 students. Founded by the Echols Team (Pseudonym), Freedom Academy began with one teacher and nine students. Currently, it has grown to 14 teachers, a librarian, an after school director, and 130 students. The curriculum consists of weekly chapel, reading, writing, math, history, art, science, and Spanish. Character development and leadership classes are offered on Wednesdays, and after-school tutoring and sports are also offered. The cost of Freedom Academy is roughly \$12,000 a year, but tuition assistance, based on need, is available. Freedom Academy is supported through individual, foundation, and corporate donations, and tuition represents about 20% of the total operating budget of 1.9 million dollars.

Theoretical Framework

The analytic used in the study of identifying the culture of an urban Christ-centered Academy is critical ethnography. Critical ethnography was developed from anthropology (Thomas, 1993) and is different from ethnography in the sense that its purpose is to accomplish more than to describe, identify, and interpret culture. The main difference between ethnography and critical ethnography is “critical ethnography seeks to change the culture” (Bransford, 2006, p. 117). In addition, critical ethnography emphasizes the importance of ethical responsibility to report, to address, and to create awareness of injustice (Madison, 2012). Thus, the researcher feels morally obliged and responsible to show compassion for the suffering (Bransford, 2006; Madison, 2012).

Thomas (1993) addressed:

Critical ethnography has a political purpose. It asks what could be and refers to the reflective process of choosing between conceptual alternatives and making value-laden judgments of meaning and method to challenge research, policy, and other forms of human activity. (p.4).

Indeed, critical ethnography seeks to expose the structure of power in society. The researcher uses critical ethnography to break through borders and to share the voices and lived experiences of participants whose life events or stories are unnoticed or “out of reach” (Madison, 2012).

Using a critical ethnographic lens for my study, I attempted to understand the culture of the Academy. During my time at Freedom Academy, I used interviews, observations, and document analyses that led to an overwhelming amount of data that supported the Christian worldview, the ethic of caring, and the use of culturally relevant pedagogy in the curriculum. While analyzing the data on Freedom Academy, I saw that the faculty and staff went above and beyond to meet their students’ academic, behavioral,

and emotional needs. They used creative teaching to represent African-American culture as well as field trips to important historical sites to make learning more personal, meaningful, and relevant for each student. The faculty and staff also emphasized the importance of a Christian worldview. Therefore, for the purpose of my dissertation study, I extended my research question from looking at the culture of the school and examined my data with the lens of worldview, ethic of care, and the use of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Statement of Problem

For the past couple of decades, urban public schools have faced serious issues in the successful education of African Americans and other minority students (Farrell & Matthews, 2006). A common trend in the 21st century is the increase of students in urban schools who are minorities. In fact, urban schools have a larger percentage of minorities in the 21st century than at any point in history (John & Ridenour, 2001). In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the Court mandated the end of racial segregation of public school. However, most African-American children attend schools that are segregated and less rigorous in academics (Bell, 1980). Parents of students who are enrolled in urban schools are looking for a more thorough education for their children (Farrell & Matthews, 2006), but as Bell (1980) reports, demographic lines and white flight make the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education* almost impossible.

Currently, school choice is one of the most talked about and controversial educational issues of the 21st century (Fowler, 2002). The debate over school choice is focused on two points: how the district boundaries should be assigned, and which schools

should receive governmental funding. Many parents view school choice as their only way out (Farrell & Matthews, 2006). Parents that advocate for school choice believe that it helps families escape failing schools and provides equal opportunities for academic excellence by allowing students to cross boundary lines (Nathan, 1996). School choice has always been available for families that could afford private schools. However, families who are less financially stable have fewer opportunities for school choice and as a result are forced to attend their neighborhood school (Fowler, 2002).

Purpose of Study and Research Question

There is a growing concern about the traditional educational system. “Far from being fair and democratic, it permits some parents to choose their children’s school with relative ease while for others such choices are prohibitively expensive (Fowler, 2002, p.5). Urban children should have equal opportunities to attend private schools because a rigorous education is just as essential for children as the rest of their basic needs (Molina, 2005). Urban children often live in communities with higher percentages of dropouts, more failing schools and lower standardized test scores (Bell, 1980; Molina, 2005). I believe that it is crucial that we give students living in urban areas the opportunity to attend urban private Christian schools. Urban Christian schools can give hope to a community and make a difference for the Kingdom of God (Molina, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the culture of a Christ-centered urban day school. The research questions for the study were:

1. How has the faculty and staff at Freedom Academy included a Christian worldview into their curriculum?
2. How do the teachers, staff, and donors at Freedom Academy demonstrate caring?
3. What role does culturally relevant pedagogy play in the curriculum at Freedom Academy?

Definitions

- Christian School-A school that promotes the Christian faith and helps students develop a Christian worldview (Van Brummelen, 2009).
- Christ-centered education-An education where students learn and are supported to reflect on how their belief in Christianity affects every field of study (Dockery, 2009).
- Christian worldview- A worldview that provides a context for ethical and critical thinking through the lens of scripture; a perspective that provides direction on how to make moral and ethical decisions. A Christian worldview supports the idea that humans are made in God's image and believes that love, grace, truth, and holiness is in Jesus Christ (Dockery, 2009).
- Urban Christian School- A school designed for urban children that provides a quality Christ-centered education for students who do not have access, either financially or geographically, to excellent independent schools (Molina, 2005).
- Worldview- A person's beliefs about the world which form a person's daily choices and actions (Colson & Pearcey, 1999).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The number of studies in the 1980s indicates an extraordinary significance in the Christian school movement at a time in which Christian schools were the “fastest growing sector of private education, representing 20% of the total private school population in the United States” (Arthur, 2012, p. 339). Currently, according to the United States Department of Education, independent academies make up nearly 25% of all elementary and secondary schools, with over 10% of all students and 12% of full-time teachers in the non-public sector (Choices For Parents: Nonpublic Education: A Vital Part of U.S. K-12 Education, 2008). Christian Academies, which make up 40% of private schools, continue to be a major aspect in education (U. S. Department of Education, 2008). Having begun in the 1950s, the Christian School movement was the result of a number of social factors including the desegregation and secularization of public schools, a growing dissatisfaction with the public school system, and a desire by Christian parents for moral and religious education for their children.

The first portion of the review of literature reflects past ethnographies focused on independent and private schools. Each study was non-judgmental and integrated semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analyses. The literature in this section of the review seemed to reflect some of the same beliefs of Freedom Academy. One of the articles addressed the sense of calling, and another focused on religious education, and building community as well as parent’s perceptions of religious

education. I continue this section of the review of literature by describing critical ethnography, Christian worldview, the ethic of care, and culturally relevant pedagogy. I then funnel the literature into themes that address the challenges of students who live in urban communities. I discuss the literature on the history of Christian education, the cultural of urban schools, and critical ethnography in concurrence with the themes that developed from the review of empirical research.

Existing Ethnographies

The literature was limited in finding scholarly peer reviewed past ethnographies in the private sector. However, I was able to find an ethnographic case study that examined how faculty members of differing religious beliefs expressed a sense of calling and regarded their jobs as a ministry. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interview questions (Merriam, 2009) to collect data. After coding the data and providing thick description (Geertz, 1973) the researcher concluded that faculty members expressed a religious calling that compelled them to work at a faith-based institution. All participants served as faculty in various positions, including deans, professors, university president, and senior administrators. Participants were selected by the use of snowball sampling (Creswell, 2005), and the researcher interviewed the participants in-person and over the phone. The researcher then transcribed all interviews to collect data (Swezey, 2009).

This study took place at a university located in the Northeastern United States. The fully accredited university offers both undergraduate and graduate classes and gives students 30 majors to choose from in earning a degree. Regent University is a Christian university where faculty members must profess to be Christians and agree to sign a

lifestyle statement. Although, Regent University is a Pentecostal school, professors do not have to be the same denomination to work at the university (Swezey, 2009).

Participants reflected on their faith and in some way believed that God led them to work at the university. Despite the different dominations, all participants expressed that obeying the calling to work at the university was more important than financial security, comfort of familiar surroundings, or tenure (Swezey, 2009). The results of this article demonstrated that, for these faculty members, “the belief in calling is often tied to the belief that they are chosen by God for a specific role or task in life” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 426). All participants held the common belief that their work had distinct meaning because the Lord had called them to their vocation. Regardless of time, financial security, or support, the participants ultimately believed that they were put on this earth to teach at a Christian university (Swezey, 2009).

Another ethnographic study focused on Hebrew-only language policy in religious education at a Jewish-day school. This study used ethnography as a lens to examine language policies, teachers’ attitudes, and how policies become a cultural practice in the classroom. (Avni, 2012). Avni (2012) spent eighteen months in one Jewish-day school where he observed in classroom settings, prayer meetings, recreational activities, and traveled with the school to Israel. Over the course of this study, the researcher intended to answer the following questions:

1. How do students and teachers enact and challenge the Hebrew-only policy in daily classroom practices?
2. How does this policy become a cultural practice in the classroom, and to what effect?

In order to find patterns and themes, both formal and informal interviews were completed, transcribed, and coded. The results of the data showed that the school's mission and policy to speak only Hebrew was to ensure that their pupils would find a sense of Jewish and religious identity.

Allen (2009) provides significant insights on the importance of being a “lady” in a private single-sex primary school. This research suggests that students who attended an all-girls primary school believed that their families and school staff demanded ladylike behavior of them. This study focused on one single-gender private elementary school in England. The economic population of the school was considered affluent and middle class. Allen (2009) used an ethnographic lens to understand the identity of young middle-class females at an all-girls school. To complete her research, she spent two years with one class of twenty-five students and used “participant observations, focus group interviews, photographic diaries and participative analysis sessions” (Allen, 2009, p. 148). The research concluded that girls who attend single-sex schools put extreme pressure on themselves to appear heterosexual or as “girly girls” (p. 155). Even though boys were not present at the school, the girls felt burdened to make themselves beautiful and attractive. The boys that “existed in their heads” (p. 155) contributed to daily choices, actions, and decisions.

Arweck and Nesbitt (2011) used a three-year ethnographic study to research the religious identity of minors in mixed-faith families that participated in religious education. The sample consisted of twenty-eight mixed-faith families. Each family participated in four interviews and researchers completed classroom observations during the study. The results of the study indicated that parents of mixed-faith families sent their

children to schools providing religious education. They wanted their children to make their own decisions about religion and brought up the topic only if the child initiated the conversation. Such findings showed how children of mixed-faith families enjoyed learning about all religions and found “value of learning about religion through peers, either in classroom discussion or by observing activities” (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2011, p. 42). The study also added that mixed-faith families sent their children to schools to emphasize the importance of tolerance and respect for all traditions and beliefs. The literature covered in the next section of the review represents the theoretical foundation I will use in this study as well as the themes that appeared in my review of past literature.

Critical Ethnography

Historically, urban schools are more likely to report issues with gangs, school dropout, and violence (Johnson, Burke, & Gielen, 2012). Keiser and Schulte (2009) argued that if a school wants to improve academics, then creating a warm learning environment or a positive school culture is imperative. However, Schaps, Lewis, and Watson (1997) emphasize that districts educating low-income students exhibit a lower sense of community compared to those in suburban neighborhoods. In fact, Gilbert’s (1997) research showed that teachers perceived students who came from urban areas as “unmotivated, unwilling, and disruptive participants in schooling” (p.93). Critical ethnography is an analytic lens or mode of thinking that studies culture, belief, and action (Thomas, 1993). In the literature, critical ethnography differs from conventional ethnography simply because its focus is not just to ask what the culture is, but what could be (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Thomas, 1993).

Using critical ethnography allows researchers to draw their data from field work where they take part in a research process in which they closely observe, record, and engage in the daily life of another culture and then think critically to challenge “truth” (Madison, 2012). Cross (2006) further explains the need for critical ethnography that addresses the needs of disadvantaged urban schools, prompting the question, “how can Americans love all their children and want them to prosper while maintaining institutions and social structures that guarantee that some children won’t?” (p.29). In essence, critical ethnography is a call to action. It allows the researcher to provide a voice, challenge “truth”, and to speak to an audience on behalf of their participants to give them a voice (Thomas, 1993).

Worldview

Sire (1976) recognizes that a worldview is an individual’s foundational assumptions about the world. These ideas or views may change, but they are the core lenses of how a person perceives or sees events. Nicholi (2002) defines worldview as follows:

It influences how we perceive ourselves, how we relate to others, how we adjust to adversity, and what we understand to be our purpose. Our worldview helps determine our values, our ethics, and our capacity for happiness. It helps us understand where we come from, our heritage; who we are, our identity; why we exist on this planet, our purpose; what drives us, our motivation; and where we are going, our destiny. (p.7)

People’s perceptions guide their thought process and ultimately their decisions. Views may or may not be exact, but they represent the notion of how each individual holds the meaning of life. Worldviews are not static but dynamic and they continue to develop throughout a person’s life (Sire, 1976). Pearcey (2004) explains that every worldview answers three questions:

1. Creation: How did the world form? How were we created?
2. Fall: What failed? Why do we suffer? Why do we have evil in the world?
3. Redemption: How can we fix the world?

A Christian worldview allows a believer to “Think Christianly” (Colson & Pearcey, 1999) meaning that a believer looks at the world with a Christian perspective. Martin (1969) stated that every religion assists with two purposes: First, religion is a message of salvation, directing a person towards how to get right with God. Second, it suggests a perspective for how a person interrupts the world. A Christian worldview does not start with the story of salvation, but rather begins when God created the heavens and earth. Thus, the Bible teaches that God was the sole creator of the world and its order (Lewis, 1952). A Christian worldview answers the question of suffering and evil. The Bible teaches that humans were created in God’s image and were perfect beings. However, all parts of creation were affected by sin and rebellion against the Originator (Pearcey, 2004). Finally, in a Christian worldview, redemption means that when the conversion process happens in a person, God gives “a new heart, and a new spirit” (Holy Bible: New International Version, Ezekiel.36.26). Redemption happened by Christ dying on the cross, and a Christian worldview ultimately allows a person who is redeemed, to have an entirely new perspective on life and the opportunity to turn back to the Creator (Colson & Pearcey, 1999). According to Schaffer (1976) if a Christian does not incorporate a Christian worldview into daily living, the outside world has the right to challenge whether Christianity is real. Thus, a Christian worldview offers a context for moral reasoning. According to Lewis (1952) a person who holds onto a Christian worldview has an eternal perspective and in order to fully serve others, one must believe that the essence

of a Christian worldview is to bring every thought captive to Christ, submit fully, deny self, and willingly join in His suffering.

Caring in Education

John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, passionately writes in 1 John 3:8, “My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality” (Holy Bible: Message, 1 John.3.18). Love shows itself by people serving each other, bearing one another’s burdens, building each other up, encouraging each other and ministering to each other (Colson & Pearcey, 1999). Jesus was the master teacher and in His teaching he modeled and emphasized, “that it was not so much the outer actions but the inner sentiments which mattered” (Johnson & Burke, 2010, p.88). Jesus saw the potential in His disciples and in people. He appreciated their strengths and truly embodied care ethics. According to Noddings (2012) in care ethics, the caregiver is less concerned with recognition, and more importantly focuses on the relationship between the caregiver and the cared-for.

Teachers approaching education through the lens of care ethics are more likely to listen attentively to their students (Noddings, 2010). According to Noddings (2006), in a caring relationship, the caregiver puts aside his or her values to listen and tries to understand the need of the cared-for. Teachers who believe in care ethics practice the following four elements that comprise the ethic of caring that Noddings (2002) describes:

1. Modeling: showing students how to care by developing genuine caring relationships with them

2. Dialogue: an open-ended relationship with the cared-for in which both students and teachers get to know each other and have the freedom to ask personal questions
3. Practice: teachers provide opportunities for students to demonstrate personal and meaningful ethics of caring
4. Confirmation: understanding the cared-for enough to recognize and cultivate their strengths and accomplishments

With this perspective, care ethics is not just focused on creating better values; it is focused on helping students become better people. Modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation allow the educator to seek out a caring relationship with his or her students. The caring teacher understands the impact that he or she has on the cared-for (Noddings, 2012).

According to Noddings (2006) a classroom teacher that promotes care is creating a learning environment where students feel safe to develop courageous conversations. Students are able to think critically and question the norm and when that type of conversation is promoted, students are more likely to feel love and accepted. Position paves the way to performance and when a student feels loved or cared for, that security frees the student to care for others. Creating open dialogue or courageous conversations in a classroom also gives educators the opportunity to model care. When teachers demonstrate active listening, they are affirming that students' voices matter and are ultimately promoting dialogue in their classroom. (Noddings, 1995).

Not only are educators modeling care by creating a warm learning environment, but teachers are also giving students opportunities to practice care by affirming them and

allowing students to use their strengths to edify others. A classroom that promotes care understands that each person is unique and has specific talents. Affirming students eliminates the desire to compare. Comparison leads to low self-confidence and causes individuals to question his or her worth (Catron, 2014). When a student is affirmed he or she is more likely to use their unique gifts to reach the sphere of influence that has been given to them. When individuals understand that they are uniquely gifted then it is easier to keep focus on the strengths that they are equipped with, instead of focusing their limitations (Catron, 2014).

Other strategies, specifically those which create hospitable environments, include developing personal and meaningful relationships with students, promoting diversity in the curriculum, and teaching students how to think critically (Burwell & Huyser, 2013). Hospitality is key to demonstrating care because it is more than welcoming and developing relationships with people who are similar. Hospitality extends to listening, learning, and honoring the differences in individuals (Burwell & Huyser, 2013). Care happens in hospitable classes. When a classroom community can create a sense of belonging, students' academic achievement will increase (Noddings, 2003). Noddings (2006) reminds us that authentic learning does not develop until students are able to see a meaningful relationship with the educator, with the community of learners, and with the curriculum.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

African-American children have not been equally educated by public schools (Darling-Hammond, 2006, Ladson-Billings, 1995). In fact, Darling-Hammond (2006) argues that American public schools have the most imbalanced curriculum in the entire

world. Culturally relevant pedagogy or teaching is “pedagogy of opposition” (Ladson-Billings, 2005). This framework intends to counter the dominant view and use students’ background knowledge and culture as an opportunity to make the curriculum come to life (Ladson-Billings, 2005). According to Esposito and Swain (2009) urban schools have been “left behind” (p.38) however, there are teachers in urban settings that are willing to become change agents and use culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. Howard (2001) describes culturally relevant pedagogy as the link between home and school. In addition, educators who incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into their curriculum are able to “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382).

According to Esposito and Swain (2009) culturally relevant pedagogy serves two purposes

First,...culturally relevant pedagogy draws on students’ home cultures as a mechanism for helping them achieve success in school. Second, through culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers enable their students to think critically about the injustices inherent in schools and the broader society. (p.38)

Culturally relevant pedagogy is more than multi-cultural education. In essence, teachers who develop lessons to support this type of pedagogy understand that their students’ culture is an asset to academic success (Miner, 2011). According to Miner (2011), one result of students who take part in a curriculum that uses culturally relevant pedagogy is empowerment. Students are able to “see their culture” (p. 69) being incorporated into the curriculum and this creates an opportunity for students to make real connections to the learning tasks. The success of using culturally relevant pedagogy lies in the hands of the educator. If teachers understand their worldview and acknowledge who they are

culturally, then they are more willing to develop curriculum that empowers students to do the same (Maye, 2011).

The rationale behind culturally relevant pedagogy is to provide educators with a way to teach curriculum without dismissing the benefits of cultural assets and race. Culturally relevant pedagogy, therefore, builds a bridge between academics and culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). When incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum Ladson-Billings (1995) believed that the framework is based on three criteria:

1. Students must encounter academic achievement.
2. Students must develop and/or build upon cultural competence.
3. Students must develop a critical thought process where their perspective can allow them to challenge the norm of the existing social order.

According to Heflin (2002), educators who use culturally relevant pedagogy should be aware of how the use of literature promotes positive self-awareness. Educators should also use open dialogue and courageous conversations to allow students opportunities to draw on their communities, home life, and history. In addition to using literature to promote culturally relevant pedagogy, educators can empower students by providing them with opportunities to feel confident about their race and ethnicity (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Thus, incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum can lead to academic achievement and positive self-awareness (Maye, 2011). The following literature addresses the history of private Christian education and the culture of urban education.

Hebrew Origins of Christian Education

Christian schooling is indebted to the Old Testament patriarchs who molded and provided an illustration of how to reside in a personal relationship with the Creator. God's aspiration has always been to witness His children growing in their faith and to pass their faith down to future generations. To bring about that objective, God chose leaders such as, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to teach others about godly leadership. Next, He sent the Torah, which has written directions, otherwise known as the Old Testament. He later commissioned judges and prophets to educate His people in the everyday application process of the Torah. In due course, this role was handed down to rabbis and scribes in the synagogue, and after the Jews returned from exile, they established schools to educate their children (Anthony & Benson, 2003).

Looking back on the origins of early Hebrew education provides a lens into God's framework and purpose of education. Scripture states what we might call the first job description, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." (Holy Bible: New International Version, Genesis.1.28). Pearcey (2004) notes that the first portion of this verse, "be fruitful and multiply," means to build up the social world: "build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws (p. 47). The second section, "subdue the earth," means to bind the natural world. For example, harvest fruits and vegetables, build roads, and invent technology. This verse may be called the Cultural Mandate because it states that the original purpose of God's design was to create cultures and assemble civilizations (Colson & Pearcey, 1999). Mayer (1966) notes that the purpose of God's command was world evangelism. God's purpose was for other nations to learn about His nature by watching how Israel related to Him. As Israel obeyed God, He would bless

them, and other nations would approach Israel, seeking how they could form a relationship with God.

Christian Education in Colonial America

Religion played an important role in developing an educational system in the United States. The Puritans, a strict fundamentalist Protestant sect who immigrated to the New World for religious freedom beginning in 1609, believed that education was necessary in order to read the Bible and to receive salvation. This was in line with the beliefs of the Protestant Reformers. Founding the New England colonies, their schools made no distinction between religious and secular life (Gelbrich, 1999). The New England colonies consisted of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. Each colony was structured around a town, which consisted of a church, a jail, local shops, and a school. The early settlers understood the importance of education and passed a law in 1642 requiring families to take an active role in educating their children on the Scriptures. In fact, families who did not uphold this law were fined. This law was an important turning point in the education system because it was the first law requiring that all children receive education in reading (Anthony & Benson, 2003). However, not until 1647 were towns mandated to build schoolhouses and employ teachers for their children (Frost, 1966).

In addition to public schools, private schools were created to serve families. Anthony and Benson (2003) address how some families wanted their children to have a more secular education than what public schools offered. During this time, public schools were religious schools that taught reading through the scriptures. Since girls were not allowed to attend public school, the colonies created the dame school (Poehler, 1966).

The dame school was a private school that gave young women their entire education. Since the towns did not have to fund the dame school, they were usually inadequately funded and the quality of both the educators and the teaching was often lacking.

Although education in colonial America took place in New England, the Mid-Atlantic colonies had a more diverse population consisting of Dutch, English, Irish, Scottish, German, and other settlers (Gelbrich, 1999). Schools in the New Netherlands were also associated with the church. In addition to the religious curriculum, the teachers were viewed as assistants to the pastor. The job description of the teacher in New Netherland included various school duties, such as the reading of scriptures and the Ten Commandments in services, directing the choir, ringing the church bell for Sunday service, providing all materials for baptisms, and serving bread and wine during communion. The people of New Netherland believed that the primary role of education was the teaching of values, traditions, and biblical scriptures (Oliver, 1961). They were also more varied in their religious beliefs and therefore did not develop a common school system such as the one that prevailed in the New England colonies. Instead, each group often developed their own school, which promoted their culture, religion and traditions. The Quakers, for instance, who settled in the Philadelphia area in the 1680s believed in educating the populace. They were also tolerant of others' beliefs and ways of life. They had a strong influence on the development of education and established the first public school (Gelbrich, 1999).

Although the colonies in New England and New Netherland shared many of the same ideas and views about education, the Southern Colonies had a different perspective. Unlike the settlers in New England and New Netherland, the people who settled in the

Southern Colonies were not fleeing religious persecution in Europe. Instead, they immigrated to America for financial gain. Many of the settlers came to America to purchase large pieces of land where they could raise products such as tobacco. In addition to the higher class, the middle and lower class citizens came to the Southern Colonies because they were able to find jobs that fit their skill set. Thus, the Southern Colonies inherited the English culture and class system (Frost, 1966). In the Southern Colonies, where society was more structured and stratified according to socioeconomic classes, the wealthy plantation owners developed their own system to prepare their sons for further education. Children from poorer households received a minimal education whereas slaves from Africa only learned what was necessary to attend their masters (Gelbrich, 1999).

The Enlightenment period of the 18th Century moved education toward deism and rationalism. In America, enlightened philosophers such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson encouraged public education but without the religious elements common in earlier history. Jefferson was a strong proponent of education, believing it to be “essential to American society” (Jefferson, 1784). He proposed two bills, the General Education Bills of 1779 and 1817, for his home state of Virginia. In these bills, he proposed public education for all at the elementary level to include reading, history, geography, arithmetic, and grammar, and to eliminate the teachings of the Bible and religion. In fact, Jefferson states, “Instead therefore of putting the Bible and Testament into the hands of the children, at an age when their judgments are not sufficiently matured for religious enquiries, their memories may here be stored with the most useful facts from Grecian, Roman, European and American history. The first elements of morality too may

be instilled into their minds” (Jefferson, 1784). Prior to the Enlightenment influence and continuing into the 19th century, American schools were both private and Protestant. The *New England Primer* and the *Hornbook* were used primarily throughout New England and in many other schools as well. Rossel (1975) described these two texts as “scarcely more than adaptations of the Bible” (p. 677). Although Noah Webster called for the establishment of public or common schools early in American history, such schools were rare until the late 1800s, but even those were Protestant in philosophy and curriculum.

With the 19th century came new challenges to America’s Protestant schools. Unrest in Europe, particularly in 1848, produced an increase in immigration from Southern and Eastern European countries. In addition, the potato blight that lasted from 1844-49 brought many Irish to America. These immigrants, largely Catholic, brought with them new issues for the public schools. Gelbrich (1999) observed that Catholic parents were concerned that their children would become indoctrinated with Protestant theology and doctrine in the public school system, whereas Protestant parents perceived the threat of Catholic doctrine infiltrating their children’s curriculum. Due to these concerns, the Catholic parochial school system was established in 1884, and Protestants rallied in support of public schools. However, a significant shift in philosophy took place in the public schools in order to stem the exodus of Catholic students, and thereby decreasing government funding. Rather than teaching morality from a Protestant perspective, educational leaders believed that schools could teach morality from a neutral position. Thus, churches gave up control of the public schools to the state (Anthony & Benson, 2003).

School Change

By the end of the 19th century, American education had clearly taken a new direction. In 1899, John Dewey published *The School and Society* in which he outlined his pedagogical reforms. These reforms certainly focused on ethical education and were just as clearly secular in nature. Progressivism sought to reform society apart from God. As Dewey stated, “I believe...that the best and deepest moral training is ...proper relations with others in a unity of work and thought” (Dewey, 1897). The progressive era emphasized advancing the American society, putting attention in scientific research, and modernizing industry to build the economy. During this time, schools were attempting to secularize education. As American public schools became more secularized, Christians began to look for alternatives.

Private schools experienced extraordinary growth between 1961 and 1971, and admission in non-Catholic private institutions doubled (CAPE, 2007). During the years between 1970 and 1980, three new Christian schools were founded every day (Laats, 2010). As a result many people have questioned the growth of private education because numerous schools were founded during a time when the United States was tackling the idea of desegregating American schools in the hope of “vindicating our fundamental belief in equal opportunity” (Baker, 2013, p. 19). The overlapping of desegregation and the growth of Christian day schools caused a dilemma for many Americans. Christian day schools had to answer the question –“were they segregation academies, or were they merely church schools?” (Laats, 2010, p.60). The desegregation of American schools is a complex issue and not the main cause of the Christian day movement, but it should be

taken into consideration as an aspect of the sudden increase in religious schools (Baker, 2013).

Another factor in the Christian day school movement was the dramatic changes in the American culture. This is apparent from the various Supreme Court decisions concerning the affiliation between religion and education. The first decision to separate church and state was recognized with *Everson v. Board of Education* (Supreme Court, 1947). With this law, neither a state nor the federal government could pass a law that would aid religions or prefer one to another. In *Engle v. Vitale* (Supreme Court, 1962), the court determined that school prayer was unconstitutional. A year later, in *Abington v. Schempp*, the Court decided to officially forbid Bible readings from the school. *Stone v. Graham* banned the exhibit of the Ten Commandments, and in 1988 the Court prohibited prayer at graduations (Burke & Avner, 2011). However, these court rulings were redesigned, and in 1995, the U.S Department of Education allowed prayer and Bible reading in school, as long it was not disruptive. Prohibited, were teacher and or school led prayer and advocating a specific religion.

In addition to the Supreme Court rulings, other educational changes stimulated the rapid growth of the Christian day school movement. During the 1950s and 1960s, spurred by the Soviet Union's launch of *Sputnik*, the United States government pushed public schools to reform science and math curricula. One of the fundamental themes of the new science curriculum was evolution. This was the first time that evolution was offered in science classes because schools feared political backlash from Christians. However, by the end of the 1960s half of America's schools taught evolution. In addition to evolution, the new science curriculum pushed for sex-education. As a result of the new curriculum

and the fear that America was drifting away from God, Protestants grappled with the idea of establishing an academically rigorous Christian school (Laats, 2012).

Overcoming Adversity

The U.S. Department of Education (2007-2012) reports that urban schools, compared to schools in the suburbs, have considerably more pupils falling beneath the basic level of achievement in all subjects on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment. In addition to the increasing achievement gap, lower-proficiency students who attend urban schools are more likely to be underprivileged and between 49% and 100% of eighth-grade students qualify for free and reduced lunch (Sandy & Duncan, 2010).

Darling-Hammond (1997) established a correlation between low family socioeconomic status and low student achievement. She suggested that poverty lowers student engagement, motivation, work ethic, and dreams. Molinia (2005) reports that students who come from urban homes are more likely to face challenges, such as limited parent involvement, broken homes, and difficulty with English. Differences in school quality are other factors of lower performance and achievement levels in urban schools (Sandy & Duncan, 2010). Darling-Hammond (2006) argues that America's schools are the most imbalanced and inadequate in the world in relation to both "inputs and outcomes" (p.1). Disparities in resources, student-teacher ratio, funds, textbooks, amenities, expenditure, and teacher quality underwrite the relationship between achievement by race and class.

The research of inequality of America's schools shows a relationship to school segregation before the Supreme Court Decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In a

qualitative study that included personal narratives from three black students who attended black-only schools it was reported that teachers in black-only schools were not formally trained and properly educated as teachers where in white-only schools. The segregated schools were unacceptably underfunded and were not provided proper resources, which ultimately influenced student achievement. One participant emphasized, “the blatant lack of equality in school facilities and resources which was, of course, a reflection of the unequal treatment of the blacks in all aspects of American life” (Pellegrino, Mann, & Russell, 2013, p.357). Still today, international assessments show that America’s schools are the most imbalanced in relations to curriculum offerings, quality of teachers, and resources provided (Educational Testing Service, 1991). Kozol (1991) compared Groudy Elementary School, a predominantly African-American student body, which used “15-year-old textbooks in which Richard Nixon is still president” with a school in an all-white (95%) student population, where students received up-to-date text books, and appropriate technology. Ten years later, Groudy Elementary still only receives \$8,500 per student in an area that has many more needs compared to \$15,000 per student in the suburban neighborhood school (Kozol, 2005, p. 321-324).

Typically, urban schools have a student body largely made up of racial minorities (Orfield, 2001). In fact, in 1999, “70% of the nation’s Black students attended predominantly minority schools, up significantly from the low point of 63% in 1980” (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 189). Since the U.S. funds schools through property taxes, urban schools do not have the funds to hire quality teachers even if they are obtainable (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Unfortunately, students who live in urban communities are faced with a high percentage of low-performing schools, dropout rates, and inadequate

teachers. In the past ten years, the percentage of students who are living in high risk poverty areas has increased by 25%. The public schools, which serve urban students, have also been under pressure since the No Child Left Behind Act (Bartels, 2013). Currently low-income students and students of color have the least qualified educators and limited exposure to higher order curriculum that promotes critical thinking. They are most likely to have a larger teacher-student ratio and attend schools that are cold and impersonal (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Outside the Lines

The Council for American Private Education (CAPE) reports that more than five million students attend private schools in the U.S. (Council for American Private Education, 2012). According to the College Board, private-school students considerably outscored students who attended public schools on the writing, verbal, and math sections of the SAT. CAPE (2012) released a study that presents a significant difference between the achievement gap of majority and minority students as well as students of low-and high- socioeconomic status in private and public education. In addition, the achievement gap closes when African-American and Hispanic children attend private school and come from strong religious homes. Stevans and Sessions (2000) discuss how African American and Hispanic pupils who come from urban areas gain the most from independent schools. In 1997, African Americans and Hispanics had a graduation rate of 91% from independent schools compared to 67% in public schools. In addition to increased graduation rates from urban minorities, it is argued that independent schools “succeed in communities where public schools fail” (p.3). In a comparable study, Neal (1997) demonstrated that there was a 26% increase in the possibility of graduation for minorities

in private independent schools. However, Molina (2005) notes that students who live in urban communities have fewer options to attend private school.

Students who attend private schools are typically from the wealthiest families in America (Bartels, 2013), and minority students are often closed out by price (Baker, 2013). Baker (2013) believes that failing public schools are not a factor for enrollment in private schools. Instead, Baker (2013) stated that enrollment increases for religious purposes and the desire for racially segregated classrooms. Securing the right to learn and providing every student with appropriate education has been a struggle for America (Darling-Hammond, 2004). This fight has continued since the time southern states enforced a law that said it was an offense to teach African Americans to read, through separate but equal schools, which, in reality, were still unequal (Anthony & Benson, 2003). Singleton and Linton (2006) published *Courageous Conversations About Race*, defining educational equality as increasing the achievement of all pupils while closing the gaps between the top and lowest students. Equity is not an assurance that all students will learn or that no one will be left behind. Instead, equity allows all students to have the necessary support and educational opportunities. Du Bois (1949) wrote:

Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental...The freedom to learn...has been bought by bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start, which will equip them with such an array of facts such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be. (p. 230-231).

More is needed to support the idea of equity and the belief that students in urban communities need to receive the maximum level of support to assure academic success (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Schools in America need to be redesigned and students need to be given equal opportunities to learn, including the option to attend private independent schools. For America to survive, we must get back to the moral purpose of education and embrace educational opportunities for all students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

One common characteristic of urban cities is the low number of Christian schools. Customarily, private Christian schools are located in the suburbs or in areas of high socioeconomic status where parents can afford to send their children to a Christian school (Laats, 2012; Laats, 2010; CAPE, 2007; Molina, 2005). Urban Christian schools are hard to find, not because students living in the inner-city and urban communities are less than capable or do not have the aptitude and capability to learn. Rather, it is usually that they are not given the opportunity to be educated in a Christian school (Molina, 2005). Freedom Academy, however, has a mission to educate children from urban communities and give them a rigorous Christ-centered education (*Annual Report*, 2013). In this study, I explored and observed the culture of Freedom Academy.

Methodological Orientation, Purpose, and Research Questions

For this ethnographic case study, I used a naturalistic approach to qualitative research. According to Patton (1990),

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting, what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting- and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting... The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p.1)

As the researcher, I disclosed and kept a record of my biases so I would not utilize my assumptions or preconceived beliefs. The focus of my study was to understand the

culture of an urban day school that offers a Christ-centered education to children of diverse economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. As a researcher, I observed events in the classroom focusing on the interaction between students and teacher, administration and teacher, and teacher-to-teacher. Since ethnography focuses on a natural setting it helped me understand the hidden aspects of people's values, actions, attitudes, and behaviors (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research questions that guided my study were:

1. How has the faculty and staff at Freedom Academy included a Christian worldview into their curriculum?
2. How do the teachers, staff, and donors at Freedom Academy demonstrate caring?
3. What role does culturally relevant pedagogy play in the curriculum at Freedom Academy?

Ethnographic Research

In this study, I used an ethnographic case study approach. According to Creswell (2007), ethnographic research is a methodology produced out of the field of cultural anthropology. This methodology focuses on the researcher encountering foreign worlds and making sense of them (Wolcott, 1980). An ethnographic study consists of the researcher participating in people's daily lives for an extended time, observing what happens, listening to participants, completing interviews, and collecting data to shine light on the focus of the research (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989). According to Wolcott (2008), ethnography is a research process grounded in fieldwork that consists of observations, interviews, and collections of artifacts.

Fetterman (2010) described the characteristics of ethnography as research that tells a trustworthy, meticulous, and genuine story. Although there are various types of ethnography, the feature that binds all types of ethnography is its focus on culture. Culture fundamentally refers back to the value systems, thinking patterns, and attitudes that guide a structure of behaviors with a specific group of people (Merriam, 2009). This approach allows the participants to have a voice in their own community, typically relying on fieldwork, quotes, and “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973). The story is articulated through the lens of the local community as they live out their lives. The ethnographer must keep an open mind. Before asking the first question, the ethnographer starts with a selection of a problem (Fetterman, 2010). This qualitative study on Freedom Academy explored why this school was created and investigated the culture of the school. The study told the story of Freedom Academy, and I included specific details and quotes from my participants. Finally, the results of this study helped to shed light on the purpose of an urban Christ-centered day school.

Research Setting and Participants

The research setting for this ethnographic study was at Freedom Academy, a Christ-centered urban day school located in the Southeastern United States. Freedom Academy was founded out of an after-school program. In 1997, the founders saw a need to educate at-risk urban youth, and the school was developed to give urban youth positive influences for more extended time periods with a goal to hopefully break the poverty cycle (*Annual year report, 2013*). Although there were multiple Christ-centered day schools in the state, I purposefully selected Freedom Academy as the site of my research to ensure that I would be able to gain access to individuals who were relevant to my

research questions (Fetterman, 2010). I purposefully chose Freedom Academy based on the following criteria: (a) private Christian school, (b) diverse student body, (c) low socioeconomic status, and (d) location. Freedom Academy exists to advance the Kingdom of God by providing the aid required to offer students of the Academy a first-rate Christ-centered education regardless of their families' economic status (*Annual Report*, 2013). The participants included five administrators, fourteen teachers, five staff members, two board members, two donors, six parents, twelve students, and three alumni from the Academy.

During my time at Freedom Academy, I completed a community scan based on the area within a five-mile radius of the Academy. It was important for me to understand the community where the students lived. The Chamber of Commerce (2014) stated that more than 5 million people and 150,000 businesses call this city home. This city also advertises multiple parks, competitive schools, and ample opportunities for the community to experience culture, attend sporting events, and dine in top-notch restaurants. However, driving around the community I learned that within a five-mile radius of the Academy the students pass one prison, one state penitentiary that is documented as a medium-security federal prison for male inmates, five liquor stores, and two adult only clubs. Within a five-mile radius of the school, there is one restaurant, Cotton Pickin Chicken, no banks, gas stations, or groceries stores. The average income of a family who attends the Academy is \$24 000, and the average home in the area sells for \$50, 775. The community is equipped with four nearby bus routes, five public schools and one private school.

Most of the buildings that surround the Academy are run-down, the playgrounds are rusted, and the library is anything but large. It is common to see trash on the road and unkempt lots on the way to the Academy. However, once you step onto the 13-acre campus, you are welcomed to clean and well-kept grounds, a new and safe playground, and three temporary school buildings. Due to the fact that Freedom Academy has been broken into seven times during the 2013-14 school year, they are currently working on finding donors to fully surround the campus with a gate, and provide lighting, and a security system for the three temporary buildings. See the appendix for pictures.

Negotiating Access

As a researcher, I had to gain permission to conduct my study at Freedom Academy. I made a phone call to the administrative assistant to ask what would be the best way to set up a meeting with the dean of the Academy. I emailed the dean and provided a brief summary of my research, the estimated time it would take to complete the study, and the participants that I would like to observe and interview. I expressed how I intended to conduct my research, including the questions I wanted to ask and what I wanted to observe. After I sent the emails, the dean contacted me, graciously approved my research and seemed supportive and excited about the opportunity for the larger community to learn more about Freedom Academy. Getting permission from the dean of the Academy was only getting my foot in the door. In ethnographic research, an introduction by a community member is the researcher's most effective way into the community or school (Bransford, 2006; Madison, 2012). During a conversation with my orthopedic surgeon, I was explaining my research interest and telling him how excited I was to work at Freedom Academy, but at the same time I was experiencing anxiety

because gaining access without a formal introduction can be a challenge and a chilling experience for the researcher (Madison, 2012). Midway through our conversation he left the room, brought my other doctor back with him, and asked her to tell me where her husband worked. To my surprise, her husband is the president at Freedom Academy. She immediately called her husband and set up a time for all of us to meet.

During my meeting with the dean and the president I was able to meet all of the teachers, observe a class, eat lunch with the students, and become more familiar with the school. The first initial meeting was important because in this type of research, a strong introduction strengthened my capacity to work in the school and showed the teachers that I was trustworthy (Fetterman, 2010). By discussing my research with the dean and introducing myself to the faculty and staff, I improved their comfort level and, therefore, diminished any anxiety about my role as a researcher.

Researcher's Role

As the ethnographer, my role was to explore the culture of Freedom Academy and provide a voice to the people that I interviewed and observed. As a researcher, I had to be ethical and sensitive to my participants and not be deceptive as I learned the culture of the Academy. I was candid about my task, explaining that I only wanted to learn more about the Academy and the culture of the school. The relationship that I desired was one of mutual respect and trust. Fetterman (2010) argues that ethnographers who gain trust from their participants will learn more about the community. "Actions speak louder than words" (p. 145) and an ethnographer's actions in the field are his or her most effective way of earning trust from the community. During my observations, I noticed that the teachers barely had any planning time. In an effort to be a participant observer and secure

important interviews, I asked if I could watch and teach a reading lesson so the two teachers could have a common planning time. Both teachers were surprised and thankful that I would teach their class. I noticed that after I taught the class for an hour, both teachers accepted me as an insider and allowed me to interview them. As an outsider, I traveled through an unfamiliar environment, and learned the culture of the Academy through the lens and eyes of the administrators, teachers, staff members, board members, donors, parents, students, and alumni. Throughout this study, I served as a participant observer (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). I took an active role, participated, and volunteered for activities and events at the Academy, but at the same time I understood that I was always at the Academy as a researcher with a purpose to define the culture of Freedom Academy. For example, although I participated in parent nights, fundraisers, site visits, future-teacher interviews, and career week, I was always analyzing and reflecting on my surroundings and constantly connecting my interviews, observations, and document analyses.

Positionality

I am, as a researcher and educator, a creation of who I am as a Christian. My positionality allows me to view the world from a Christian Worldview and as a result, I have a strong bias towards Biblical truth. My perspective, values, and belief systems affect my choice in profession, my philosophy of teaching, and the research that I choose to do. I work at a Christian university and see my job as a ministry. I do not change my conviction based on what others are doing or believe. Neither do I judge them based on what God has asked of me. My perspective on the Lord and convictions to live for Him are personal. My life verse is “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good

works, which He prepared beforehand so that we might walk in them” (Holy Bible: New International Version, Ephesians.2.10). This verse has four powerful statements. We are His masterpiece, created a new, to do good things, and to act according to His will. This verse reassures me that we are fully equipped in Him to complete what His will requires. The heart and the head are only 18 inches apart but those inches might be the most important aspect of my faith. Iselin and Meteyard (2010) state that, “right thinking follows and informs and only sometimes precedes right living. Soulful practices represent not just the doing of theology, but the mysterious dance of theology itself” (p. 35). Many Christians prefer to talk about thinking Christianly (Pearcey, 2004) instead of how to live like a Christian. My belief of faith is much more complex than thinking and believing in the principals of Christianity. The “mysterious dance” (Iselin & Meteyard, 2010) metaphorically refers to the complexity of integration of faith in one’s life. I believe that by actively demonstrating my faith I am able to close the gap between the head and the heart. From my perspective, Jesus is the main focus of knowledge, truth, love and the natural authentic outpouring of my faith. Thus, faith must be lived; the imitation of Christ is the goal for my life. Since I cannot separate my faith from any aspect of my life, I have made a commitment to live what I believe in an authentic and meaningful way.

I have always had a special place in my heart for the people in this world who have no voice. Growing up I played basketball in the inner city. My parents would drive me to practice each day, so I could play with the best players in the state. It was there that I realized that I was different from my teammates. Even though I looked different, acted differently, and spoke differently my teammates always accepted me for who I was. I was the minority, always the only Caucasian on my team. Playing in this environment opened

my eyes to a world that I did not live in. Participating in sports, especially in this environment, allowed me to connect with all types of people. I always felt comfortable with my teammates, but as we got older I noticed that our educational dreams were different. The schools that I attended prepared me for college and some of my teammates were not as fortunate to attend such schools. In college, I was asked to intern in a single gender, full inclusion, fourth grade class. Participating in the single-gender program showed me how important it was to provide a learning environment where students felt safe, secure, and loved to take risks. At every school that I have taught, I have always been overwhelmed by the poverty, home environments, and limited opportunities that my students experienced. I would empty my soul as I taught, and it was in the classroom where I learned that I could not change the world for every single person. I believe that Christ can change a person's life. My job is just to share joy with others, to love my students, and their parents. I believe that Christ calls His followers to be many things, but safe is not one of them (Davis, 2011). I want to make a difference in someone's life and if one person can see Jesus in me, then every risk and surrendered dream is worth it. I chose to do this study as my dissertation not because I wanted to change the world, but because I just wanted to take initiative for what was right in front of me, my love for all children. Because I have been given so much, I wanted to give back. I saw a need to educate inner-city students. I believe that there is a difference between urban schools and inner-city schools. It was important to me that I chose to give a voice to people who worked and attended an inner-city school. This study was so much more than a dissertation; it was a healing grace, where I finally understood that my passion had a purpose. We all have passions and all of us have power to influence the world. Since I am a Christian, I believe

that God gives each believer the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit and other life circumstances can direct us to our purpose in life. My purpose in life is to give a voice to the unheard.

Data Collection Plan

Over the course of six months, I implemented a study that involved multiple forms of data collection. This ultimately helped me triangulate my data. Triangulation is at the heart of ethnographic research because it is a source of validity. Triangulation allows the research to test one source of information against the other. This enables researchers to “strip away alternative explanations and attempt to prove a hypothesis” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 94). The first method of data collection were the collection of documents. I asked the dean and other staff members to help me gather information such as publications, newsletters, marketing information, and calendars and schedules.

The second measure of data that I collected was in the form of observations. Participant observation entails personal, meaningful, and long-term communication with the participants at the Academy (Glesne, 2011). This allowed me to immerse myself in understanding the community. During observations, I looked for patterns, common beliefs, and values that repeated themselves over the period of time that I observed at the Academy. My observations guided my interview questions. Interviewing is one of the most important types of data collection for the ethnographer (Merriam, 2009). I used both semi-structured interviews and informal interviews. Informal interviews are the most common interviews because they are casual conversations that helped me understand my participant’s values. I also used semi-structured interviews where I developed an interview guide to help aid in conversation with my participants. I included more open-

ended questions to understand how my participants defined the culture of the Academy (Glesne, 2011).

While collecting my data, I also composed reflective memos about my experiences at Freedom Academy and with the participants. My memos addressed situations across different experiences, helped me reflect on what questions I should ask next, and where I should observe in the future and helped me frame my research (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Not only did reflective memos help me with the focus of my research, but they also helped with accountability and allowed for critical insight. Using memos while completing critical ethnography is important because you are able to discover if the questions that you are asking are uncovering answers that are deeper than surface level (Thomas, 1993). Since critical ethnography seeks to change the culture it is important to be as transparent and reflective as possible. Composing memos allowed for repetitive exposure of my data and gave me time to self-reflect on any bias that I might have. The main purpose for my reflective memos was to help provide a guide for my thinking. My memos almost turned into graphic organizers were I used them as support to help with critical reflection. This strategy ultimately allowed me to view my data with multiple perspectives.

Data Management Plan

I managed my documents by recording them on a spreadsheet that included the name of each document, a description of the document and the person who retrieved the document. I made a binder and kept all binders in a locked cabinet in my office. While interviewing my participants, I used my iPhone to ensure that I was able to record exact

phrases and comments. I also transcribed my recordings and saved them to my computer with a password-protected file.

Data Analysis

During this study, I analyzed documents, interviews, direct observations, and participant observations. After collecting data, I transcribed my interviews and looked for themes and patterns explaining the culture of the Academy. According to Merriam (2009), data analysis is simply the ability to make sense of the data and by merging, reducing, and inferring what my participants will say. By doing this I was able to make meaning of and understand the culture of the Academy. Ethnographers use content analysis to triangulate information within documents and written text. As I sorted through my data, I had to condense it into smaller themes by coding and interpreting the patterns that emerge. “Coding is how you define what the data you are analyzing are about” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 38). Coding my data helped me organize, categorize, and find themes, but it was imperative that I was able to make connections. By identifying and reviewing documents, I was able to have a more complete understanding of the culture of the Academy (Glesne, 1995). I used ATLAS.ti to help manage and arrange my documents. ATLAS.ti was developed by Thomas Mur to help researchers transfer data into useful themes or categories. ATLAS.ti helps researchers navigate through data by allowing them to connect interviews, memos, and codes. (Muhr, 2005). I used this software to organize my field notes and search for patterns. ATLAS.ti did not analyze my data for me, but it allowed reliability to improve because I was able to quantify the number of times a theme or topic was found in my field notes, interviews, and memos. The use of ATLAS.ti also assisted me to create subcategories and helped me visualize how the

pieces of my research fit together as I understood the culture of the Academy. According to Fetterman (2010), database programs allow data to be sorted effortlessly. “Database software also provide a systematic form of triangulation, helping keep the ethnographer honest by providing direct access to the raw data in context” (p.99). Ultimately, the researcher still must be active in the process of interpretation, but ATLAS.ti will help the researcher manage his or her research by providing clarity and the ability to track themes that emerge throughout the research.

Confidentiality and Ethics

The adults participating in this study provided consent to participate when they signed the consent form. Since students and minors are a protected category in the International Review Board (IRB) I gained permission with a letter from the dean of Freedom Academy stating that I could interview students and alumni. I also sent my application to the IRB and was granted accesses to interview and observe students and minors at the Academy. The students and minors participating in this study provided consent to participate when they signed the consent form. The parents and guardians of the students had to sign a consent form to allow students to participate, but the student always had the final say. I ensured confidentiality of my participants by assigning them and the Academy a pseudonym. Throughout the study, I reminded my participants that I was recording our conversations, and ensured them that I would not share any of the information without their permission.

Trustworthiness

Since humans are the main source of data collection in ethnographic research, interpretations and analyses are accessed directly from observations and interviews (Merriam, 2009). In order to establish trustworthiness or validity and reliability LeCompte and Preissle (1993) recorded four attributes that provide high internal validity of ethnographic research:

First, the ethnographer's common practice of living among participants and collecting data for long periods provides opportunities for continual data analysis and comparison to refine constructs; it ensures a match between researcher categories and participant realities. Second, informant interviews, a major ethnographic data source, are phrased in the empirical categories of participants; they are less abstract than many instruments used in other research designs. Third, participant observation, the ethnographer's second key source of data, is conducted in natural settings reflecting the life experiences of participants more accurately than do more contrived or laboratory settings. Finally, ethnographic analysis incorporates researcher reflection, introspection, and self-monitoring that Erickson (1973) calls disciplined subjectivity, and these expose all phases of the research to continual questioning and reevaluation. (p. 342)

To establish credibility, I triangulated my data by conducting interviews, observations, and document analyses. I also used member checking to help with the trustworthiness of my research. Member checking requires the researcher to share transcripts and other data sources with participants (Glesne, 2011). This process helped me as the researcher to make an accurate representation of the participants. It was also important that I included enough detail so that readers can assess the trustworthiness of this research. I addressed transferability by writing with thick description and included word-for-word quotes in my research. I also remained neutral and documented my biases in my memos so I was always reflecting on how to stay objective during my time at the Academy.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was the time. Most ethnographic studies last from one to three years, where I only spent six months at the Academy. Since I had a full time job, I was only able to observe at the Academy two days a week. Another limitation might have been that some of the staff members and teachers felt obligated to participate instead of choosing to participate. My goal was for the participants to feel like they could trust me, but at times they may have been fearful to express their true feelings since I was completing research. As much as I wanted my participants to observe me as an unbiased person, some participants might have felt that I was evaluating and judging their inadequacies as a teacher or a leader. To overcome this limitation of power, I used member checking and openly communicated with each participant.

Summary

In this qualitative study, I explored how faculty and staff members described and defined the culture of Freedom Academy. To understand the culture of the Academy, I used an ethnographic approach and spent six months at the Academy. To triangulate my data I used informal and semi-structured interviews, participant observations, document analysis as well as member checking. I respected the confidentiality of my participants by using pseudonyms and I used ATLAS.ti to help organize my data and develop themes by coding. This process helped me discover the culture of Freedom Academy, an urban Christ-centered school in Southeastern, United States.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In the Bible, David, the youngest son of Jesse and a shepherd learned that a nine-foot-tall Philistine, Goliath, had been provoking Israel for 40 days. Goliath challenged Israel to a fight. However, Goliath petrified King Saul and the army of Israel. When David saw that no one would step up to fight Goliath, he volunteered. In addition, to fighting Goliath, David insisted that he would not fight in King Saul's armor. David, picked up five smooth stones, took his slingshot, and with the power of God, defeated Goliath (Moore, 1999). The "David" is Freedom Academy, a small urban day school that offers a Christ-centered education to inner-city students. The Academy's "Goliaths" are the issues that many urban students face, including poverty, limited parent involvement, failing schools, limited resources, and rough living conditions (Donovan, Galatowitsch, Hefferin, & Highland, 2013). African-American children fall behind their white classmates in all standardized tests, and are more likely to drop out of school and be suspended (Bray, 1987). The high school dropout rate in urban areas, where the population is majority African American, is about 35% (Bray, 1987). Many of the educational statistics correlate with low-socio economic status. In fact, according to Harlan (1985),

Nearly one out of two African American children is poor. The rate of infant mortality among African Americans is twice that of whites. African American children are five times as likely as white children to be dependent on welfare and to become pregnant as teens; they are four times as likely to live with neither parent, three times as likely to live in a female-headed household, and twice as likely to live in substandard housing. (p. 9A)

Ladson-Billings (2009), suggests that public schools still have not proven a sustainable curriculum that enhances and improves the education for African-American students. Although test scores have gone up modestly, the academic achievement gap between whites and African American is still in place. However, closing the achievement gap is no easy task.

In this chapter, I look at how the participants in this study emphasized a Christian worldview, and demonstrated caring, and culturally relevant pedagogy while interacting with students in a small urban Christ-centered day school. I begin the discussion by introducing how the Christian worldview changed the culture of the Academy and how faith was implicitly and explicitly taught by the teachers, staff, and donors in the Academy. I continue the discussion by introducing the ethic of care displayed by the teachers, staff, and donors and then introduce the role of culturally relevant pedagogy within the Academy. By incorporating these factors into the Academy, the participants believed that they were in the process of defeating their “Goliaths.” Due to confidentiality and respect for the Academy, I refer to my participants by pseudonyms.

Christian Worldview

How an individual thinks determines how he or she lives. Schaeffer (1976) states that people have presuppositions. Presuppositions are how humans see the world, or, the lens of their basic worldview. “Presuppositions rest upon that which a person considers to be the truth of what exists” (p.19). A worldview answers the questions: Who are we? What is my purpose on this earth? How did we get here? Pearcey (2004) mentions that for a Christian, developing a genuine worldview is more than shifting the way one thinks.

At the core, it is a deepening of our spiritual character and the character of our lives. It begins with the submission of our minds to the Lord of the universe, a willingness to be taught by Him. The driving force in worldview studies should be a commitment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strengths, and mind (p. 24)

Stakeholders at Freedom Academy developed and taught from a Christian worldview by submitting their lives to God in an act of worship and service. Pearcey (2004) states that the Bible becomes a lens for a new perspective on the way a Christian thinks and acts. Teachers at the Academy believed that incorporating a Christian worldview into their curriculum would help prepare their students for future life circumstances. One teacher stated,

I think I incorporate a Biblical worldview and that it is the most important aspect of culture. I try to get kids to understand that no matter what race you are, these are principles that guide our lives. It comes so natural in life skills. We are not just talking about character traits; we are talking about how does scripture deal with us being dishonest, and the fruits of the spirit, and what that looks like. Also in history there is so much overlap. I always go back to Scripture. What is our responsibility as Christian people? (M. Williams, personal communication, February 27, 2014).

Through this study, I have found that in an effort to emphasize a Christian worldview, stakeholders at the Academy felt called to educate urban youth and their families with what it means to advance the gospel and to think Christianly (Colson & Pearcey, 1999). Participants also believed that their job was a ministry. It was important to all participants to integrate their faith into the curriculum.

Unleashing the Caged Lion

Believers in Christianity are not just called to advance the gospel through individuals, but they are called to redeem cultures (Colson & Pearcey, 1999). Spurgeon states that “the gospel is like a caged lion. It does not need to be defended, it just needs to

be let out of its cage” (as cited in Pearcey, 2004, p. 17). The mission of the Academy “exists to advance the Kingdom of God by providing the funding necessary to offer students of Freedom Academy an excellent, Christ-centered education regardless of their families’ economic status” (*Annual Report*, 2013). In this study, the dean was adamant about demonstrating and advancing the gospel by shifting the culture to focus on servant leadership. When asked about how he shows care in the Academy, the dean stated,

I think we do that in a number of ways. Number one, we try to emphasize that in our chapels. We are not here just by accident, but we actually have a purpose in life. That we are here to serve others and help those in need. Servant leadership is emphasized every Friday. Our kids serve a lot. Our kids raise money for cancer, they build water towers in Africa, and they build playgrounds. They do things that are pretty neat for a junior high situation. The overall program for me is moving along in the servant leadership area because the community can’t exist without you in it and doing something positive. I want our students to work hard. Especially the black boys. The world thinks they can’t keep a job, they can’t be successful, and that they don’t want to work hard. Well that will not be the case. (D. Martin, personal communication, April 8, 2014).

Service was an important aspect of the Academy’s culture. For believers, community service not only allows the individual to understand who they are, but service, also provides an opportunity to see how one’s identity as a Christ-follower affects the community (Feenstra, 2011).

A Biblical worldview on service matches Christ’s life. He calls the believer to serve the poor and the world, not to just become better humans but to “fulfill who we were created to become loving servants who by giving, receive” (Ver Beek, 2002, p. 58). During an observation, the president addressed the importance of service to a nonprofit organization that was interested in giving \$100,000 to the Academy. He stated that the mission of the school was to advance the gospel through service. One way the students demonstrated the gospel was, by collecting blankets in the winter months and hand-

delivering them to the homeless. Another way the students demonstrated the gospel was by collecting food for the food bank and serving breakfast together at the local soup kitchen. Teachers expressed the importance of teaching students at the Academy to serve. Teachers stated,

It is so important that we teach our students to serve because they need to learn how to serve. We are serving them and they need to learn how to give back. That is what we are called to do; serve. I think even for an underprivileged person, they need to learn how to serve. Especially when so many people are giving to them. It is a gift and they need to give a gift. What turns around comes full circle (T.Miller, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Everyone needs help. The Bible says that no man is an island to himself. So if someone helps you we should help others. Pay it forward. You picking up trash makes the area look better. You never know, you may be in the situation that you might need help. So if you humble yourself and start now it won't be such a task or so hard to learn when you get older. We have a donor that gave \$20 to each student, but they had to decide how they were going to help someone else. I made my students tell me what they did. I wanted them to be accountable (D. Ann, personal communication, February 14, 2014).

Throughout interviews, teachers at Freedom Academy expressed the importance of service-learning. Feenstra (2011) notes that when students are able to serve their community, they will have a better understanding of they are, what their talents and burdens are, and understand how their gifts can best serve others. It was obvious during interviews that not only did faculty and staff desire to serve but the students discussed the importance of it as well. When asked about demonstrating the gospel, one student stated,

I demonstrate the gospel by serving. I help pass out food to the homeless in the city once or twice a month, and also in the beginning of the year the Academy takes us to the Safe House and we go out and get homeless people on the streets and invite them to our breakfast. We make them coffee and pancakes. We talk to them and pray for them. In a couple of weeks we will go to the food bank and sort cans. It is really important to serve because we need to give back to our community (S. Stevens, personal communication, April 3, 2014).

Galatians 5:13-14 charges believers to serve one another. “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Holy Bible: New American Standard Bible, Galatians. 5.13.14). Participants believed in demonstrating love and showed that through the act of service. While serving, many people become interested in recognition (Moore, 1999). According to interviews, however, a believer who serves is spurred on by what Christ did on the cross and the overwhelming joy of remembering His sacrifice creates a desire to serve others. A Christian worldview believes that God deserves the recognition for the believer’s service. Since the fall, God has had one plan and purpose for His children. His love, dying on the cross, was meant to bring believers back to full glory (Voskamp, 2012). “The work of a believer is to trust and to give thanks, Jesus replied, “This is the work (service) that God asks of you: that you believe in the One Whom He has sent (that you cleave to trust, rely on, and have faith in His Messenger)” (Holy Bible: Amplified Bible, John. 6.29).

Who Shall I Send

From the beginning of the first interview, all participants described a sense of calling to teach, work, and volunteer at Freedom Academy. A calling is a belief that a person is chosen by God to complete a specific task or purpose on earth (Dockery, 2009).

Mrs. Lewis expressed that her heart has always been for inner city youth.

My heart is for inner-city kids, so if we want to go back that far it has been on my heart since the 8th grade. The Lord really just placed inner-city children on my heart. You need to love on kids. I kind of forgot about that when I was figuring out my major. I was like oh what do I want to do when I grow up? I was looking at all things. I went into school being a broadcast major and that is how the Lord helped me narrow down where I wanted to go to school, and that is how I ended

up at UGA, because it has a good broadcasting department. But then I went to the Passion conference and I felt like the Lord was telling me it is not about you, it is about making my name famous. I immediately went back and changed my major. That week the Lord just impressed on my heart that you need to teach in the inner city and that is my heart for you. That is your purpose on this earth. (K. Lewis, personal communication, April 2, 2014).

A calling emphasizes the special purpose and allows an individual to believe that his or her work has meaning (Sproul, 1992). Mrs. Lewis believed that God called her to teach urban youth and that she will be teaching in this environment her entire life because in an urban classroom is where she feels the most at home. Two teachers expressed that regardless of income, they believed their hearts and callings were in urban education to give students the same opportunity that they had growing up. They stated,

I had a heart for urban students and youth. I came from a more privileged background and went to a private all-white school that I just wanted to experience the other side of it. I want to give these kids the same opportunities that I had. I think that is why a lot of people come here. I was an art education major and printmaking and I just felt this calling. I did not seek this out; it just approached me to work here (M. Michaels, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

My biggest thing is teaching to the heart. I think it is so cool that I get to tell them that I love you no matter what. It's what my parents told me, and they might not always hear that at home. I feel like the Lord called me here and gifted me with words of affirmation. I think that builds security in the classroom. Just that it is okay to mess up and I will still love them no matter what. They don't have to prove anything, no matter what I will always love them and that I care. I think especially at this young age. Honestly, it is where they become who they are. They develop personalities and morals. If they have someone who is encouraging their heart and encouraging people to be great friends, respectful, and great people. Well I think the foundation starts in my room. (B. Boo, personal communication, March 25, 2014).

These participants believed that it was their calling to work in an urban setting so they could give a sense of hope to urban youth. They both wanted their students to experience love and security in the classroom and chose to provide joy every day by encouraging and loving their students. Interviews suggested that it was important for the participants

to encourage their students in the classroom and build them up with positive words because not all of the students come from positive home lives. Faculty and staff felt it was their job to make sure that the students at Freedom Academy felt safe and encouraged while at school.

A person with a calling to teach understands that it takes a village to raise a child. Although the participants did not have control over all of the challenges that threaten the students at Freedom Academy, they were always thinking of ways to support the child both academically and emotionally. In one observation, I observed a teacher using proximity of control with her students and affirming them by saying how proud she was of them. She would constantly tell her students to move their clip up, and told them they were working so hard on their handwriting. I noticed that every time she would give her class a compliment or challenge them to try harder, they would respond immediately and positively to her request. One lead teacher expressed,

I am blessed to get people who have a calling versus a gift or a talent. Second, I have people who truly have the heart for the things of God. They really believe it and they live it every day. Teaching is like being a pastor. You can always have the talent, but if it isn't a calling then I am sorry. I look at teaching as a person who has their mind always on their students. That is the God part of teaching. You have to love beyond the books. That is when you know you are in the right place. When you get angry and you see what is hindering, but you don't give up, but you get stronger. The enemy is not going to defeat me, I am going to fight. You have to have a calling to know when you have spiritual warfare. You are going to understand that with everything you do in the natural there is a spiritual consequence. I can identify the natural, but then I have to step back and look at the spiritual situation. That is why we go into battle. You can only battle when you are called (A. Simmons, personal communication, April 3, 2014).

Faculty, staff, and donors accepted the challenge and the opportunity to work in an urban setting. They believed that it was important to reflect on what learning strategies might be helpful for each child. Darling Hammond (2005) mentions that the most important factor

of teaching is to keep what is best for the child at the center of all decisions. One document stated that the faculty at Freedom Academy were committed to Christ, education, and to the children. The document explains to the parents how to communicate to faculty and staff in a Biblical manner and states that all decisions will be made in the best interest of the students. Even though there are many outside challenges that affect the learning environment in an urban school, teachers believed that if they kept their students' best interest at heart, then their students would succeed.

Teachers at Freedom Academy seemed to understand that challenges would come, but since they felt called, they had peace and assurance that God was in control. Knowing that they were called allowed them to see challenging situation with a Biblical worldview. One teacher stated,

This job really chose me. I have complained a lot about how kids don't know how to speak and write, and I thought well I could do something about that...this is the hardest job I have ever done, but it is the most rewarding. My first class will be graduating from high school this year and they have done really well. I find great pleasure in knowing that I have helped them succeed. I have one young lady who is living in DC, and she is the debate champion. It is the most difficult job I have ever done, but they make it worth it (D. Stan, personal communication, February 27, 2014).

Teachers that expressed a calling to work with the students believed that every student was gifted for the body of Christ, and when those gifts were not used, the entire body of Christ would lose out. It was evident during interviews that not only did faculty and staff feel called to work at Freedom Academy, but alumni discussed how they believed they were called to attend Freedom Academy. One alumna stated,

Alea: My story is really funny. I wanted to go to a school of performing arts, but my mom thought I needed a Christian education. It was really hard because I love the arts and music, but I had to think about my future and what would be better for my future and this choice was way better, and I am glad that I came to the Academy.

Kristy: Why was it better?

Alea: I prayed about it and God led me here, and that is why it was better. (A. Meyer, personal communication, March 4, 2014).

Alea believed that God answered her prayer by saying no to the performing arts school, and yes to the Academy. She expressed that God sometimes says yes, no, or wait.

According to Stanley (2008) God leads the believer and always answers His children's prayer. A Biblical worldview suggests that God's answers are always best for His children. Many times an unanswered prayer is for a believer's protection.

Integration of Faith and Learning

According to Harris (2004), Christianity is both a type of knowledge and a way a person sees the world. The theory of integration of faith and learning for a Christian is grounded in the belief that all truth is God's truth. For a Christian, the main purpose for learning is to help the individual grow closer to God. "Faith and learning can be integrated, and neither faith nor learning should be considered a separate or independent arena of life" (p. 18). A person's commitment to Christianity, or another faith and philosophy, unavoidably affects one's knowledge base and belief of the world (Peracy, 2004). The goal of a Christian school is ultimately to educate students, however, Christian schools are also charged with the task of integrating their faith into the curriculum. An interview with the Freedom Academy president revealed that one of the goals the school wants to accomplish is for the "students to know who they are, whose they are, and for the students to know what it means to attend the Academy. It means care, love, and grace" (P. Wheeler, personal communication, March 7, 2014). Participants in this study wanted to teach the students at Freedom Academy how to take what they

were learning in the classrooms, and apply it to their lives with a humble spirit of Christian service (Dockery, 2009).

The participants in this study implicitly and explicitly integrated faith into the curriculum. During one observation I saw how faith was explicitly taught. I was greeted by a third grade student who invited me to study the Bible with the class. I sat down on the floor with the class because I wanted to join the lesson. The teacher was very passionate as she taught the story of Joseph's life. During an interview, one student expressed that reading the Bible in school was his favorite aspect of the Academy. This particular student just transferred from a public school. I observed a conversation between a mother and a teacher. During this conversation the mother brought up the importance of safety. She wanted her child to feel safe to take risks and be himself at school. Therefore, I started my interview with asking Kerry if he felt safe at school.

Kristy: Do you feel safe?

Kerry: I feel so safe. In my old school my name is Kerry and everyone used to laugh at me and when I came to this school everyone was like it's okay to be short, it's okay to have that name. They didn't make fun of me, and that is why I decided to step up my game. I stopped all the bad things I was doing. I stopped making fun of people and bullying people. I stepped up my game because here we are a family, and I don't want to bully my family.

Kristy: Okay. Why here?

Kerry: I learned that it was not okay to do that.

Kristy: Who taught you that?

Kerry: The Bible

Kristy: Can you describe that?

Kerry: I started reading the Bible at night for school. It taught me. My teacher is a saved woman, and my teacher in public school lived for the world. I love that my teacher tells me good encouraging stories.

Kristy: What do you love the most about the Academy?

Kerry: Helping me get closer to God. I wasn't saved at the last school, therefore, I did not behave. I am saved now and I need to act responsible. I gave my soul to God and I let Him in my heart. This has really helped my academics because God helped me learn my lesson. He wants me to work hard and I want to honor Him (K. Cash, personal communication, April 3, 2104).

Kerry suggested that by reading the Bible his entire perspective was changed. He enjoyed learning about God's truth because he needed to know it to help him make better decisions in the future. Participants believed that teaching the Bible was an important part of their curriculum. The teacher reminded her students that they might not always have the Bible, but if they had it in their hearts, no one could take it away.

Another way that teachers can implement faith into their classroom is by modeling. Hardin, Sweeney, and Whitworth (1999) completed a study that looked at how the religious principles and beliefs at faith-based institutions influenced the teacher education program. This research pointed out the importance of professors modeling for students their Christian faith and values. "This is something that does not happen just in the classroom, but in numerous interactions with students through activities such as counseling, advising, and mentoring" (p. 2). It is often in these times that teachers have the most profound impact on their students. This is where students can see that a teacher's faith is not something he or she merely claim in the classroom, but something he or she practice in all aspects of their life (Hardin, Sweeney, & Whitworth, 1999).

During a site visit, I observed a panel interview and one of the questions that the audience asked the panel was, how do you integrate your faith into the curriculum? One teacher expressed that she models her faith and encourages it in her classroom. She teaches that God is a God of excellence and not perfection. I was in the audience when she stated, we give Him praise where praise is due and we teach progress not perfection. Another teacher mentioned, that she teaches faith by modeling work ethic and responsibility. She also models and shows His love through discipline. She expressed that she wanted to challenge her students to grow and be able to talk through issues with a Christian worldview, and she also mentioned that she makes her students memorize Bible verses that focus on what they are struggling with. Not only do teachers believe that they model and integrate their faith through discipline, but when asked to describe his teacher, one student stated, “They are nice, funny, they love us, and they discipline us.” He then went on to say “they discipline me so I will learn my lesson and I won’t do whatever I did again. They care enough about me to say no more” (M. Mercy, personal communication, March 11, 2014). Participants in this study believed that discipline was an act of care. In their minds, discipline was not a form of punishment, but rather a form of protection. Teachers disciplined their students in order for them to understand what type of behavior was acceptable and how to act responsible.

A group of professors at Liberty University (Sites, Garzon, Milacci, & Boothe, 2009) completed a study on how educators described the construct of integration and how they applied their understanding of these descriptions to their work. One of the professors stated:

Faith is paramount. It's just, it is your being. People need to be able to see Christ emulating through you in your care, in your touch, how you speak with them, how you have eye contact with them. What is your presence? They need to see that emulating from you, from your walk with Christ. (Sites, et al., 2009, p. 30)

It was obvious from my interviews that the teachers at Freedom Academy could not separate who they were at the core of their being from their work. One teacher explained how she integrated her faith when dealing with parents and clarified why she adopted a child into her home for the semester,

What I came to understand was, you simply look at it this way, we can bash parents all day long but I have found that every parent wants the best for their child. They just may not be strong enough to be the parent they need to be for their children, especially mothers. So I had to look at all of those factors and say okay, she just may not be strong enough as a parent. I could easily judge her, but I weigh the situation and I just say she is just not strong enough right now. So how can I help her out? Not by judging her or dumping on her. I am not going to say you are not getting this homework done, no, I am going to say, let me see what I can do. I use this concept that I created in my head and I call it the Moses. Moses had a whole bunch of excuses and God listened to all of those excuses. God asked him, "What do you have in your hand?" Moses said "I have a rod." I took that and asked myself, "What do I have in my hand? I have this child." I can't force this parent to be what they need to be for this child, but what can I do? I could blame it on the parent, but I am not going to do that. If I do that, the child suffers. I am going to trust God and I am going to partner with my parents. I will not judge them, but I will help them. (A. Simmons, personal communication, April 3, 2014).

The participants in this study believed that integration is when a believer actually practices what they teach. As a teacher, if they are preaching to their students the love of Christ and how they give empathetic care, they should be modeling that in every area of their lives. Participants believed that it was important to show Christ's affection to difficult people, as obnoxious as they may be. The participants in this study believed if they could integrate their faith during the demanding times, their students would find courage and be able to see life with a different perspective (Sites, et al, 2009).

In addition to directly integrating faith into the classroom with their pedagogy, participants in this study integrated their faith in terms of personal relationships with students and parents. This shows the importance of cultivating relationships with others outside of the classroom. One participant described her faith as being inseparable from the way she treats others, not just in the classroom on campus, but also in the community. She expressed that it was important for her to share her testimony with her class, and show her students that Christ was the center of her life. This participant viewed her job as a ministry and saw an important need to express how her family would look different from her students. She stated,

Kacey: I take my 6th graders home to Tennessee with me for a week. I want them to see where I came from. I make sure to tell them that my family is going to look a lot different than yours. I make an emphasis to say that The Lord blessed me in that way, but He has blessed you in all different ways. So your testimony is going to look different from mine, but that is okay because the Lord has put us on different journeys.

Kristy: Why is that important to you?

Kacey: It is just the biggest thing to show them what a family that is centered on Christ looks like. So my favorite thing, well it is fun just going home, but my mom cooks all meals for them for a week. Every morning we will have pancakes and waffles. In the evenings we do family dinner and devotions. We open up the Bible together and do the devotion together. It is really fun. This is really important. It is such a time where we bond together and to see a model of a family that one day they can have, a family that is centered on Christ. (K.Ross, personal communication, April 3, 2014).

Kacey believed that this trip was the highlight of her students' year. Allowing her students to come home with her for a week allowed them to know her, and gave her an opportunity to integrate her faith in a more personal way. They were able to see how Christ was the center of her life, and since they built such a strong relationship and

connection with her and her family, her students were more motivated to learn in the classroom.

Care Ethics in an Urban Setting

When a child's surroundings or home are unstable, chaotic, and unsafe, it is vital that he or she find stability and care in another area of their life (Donovan et al., 2013). The ethic of care in schools can help close the gap in student achievement (Noddings, 2002). However, many urban youth lack the connection with their teachers, and thus are not achieving in academics (Sergiovanni, 2005). Valenzuela (1999) and Noddings (1992) argue that before a student can become motivated or connected in the classroom, they must first develop a personal relationship with a caring adult. The viewpoint of an ethic of care is that the element of being cared for is universal, although being cared for might look different in various cultures, relationships, and across time. Noddings (2002) states, that the longing and desire to be cared for results in creating and cultivating relationships that allow humans to care and to be cared for. Participants in this study accepted the responsibility to create such relationships with their students. One student mentioned how, at his public school, the teachers did not have time to get to know him on a personal level and how that affected his academics and attitude. Once he was enrolled at Freedom Academy, he decided that he needed to step up his game. When asked how his classmates and teachers showed the ethic of care, he stated,

Kerry: They always help me and I help them. My friend Noah and Jeremiah help me out when I do something wrong. They come up to the board and we will work a problem out together. No one in our class will leave each other out. We all stick together. My teacher really pushes me.

Kristy: What do you mean, pushes me?

Kerry: Let's say that I am failing in math, which I am not. She would say come on Kerry get it together, and then she would say we need to do tutorial. I am not the kind of person that is good with that. When you talk to me, I need you to show me on the board. She always shows me on the board. She gets the way I learn. She spends extra time with me after school to make sure I know what I am doing (K. Cash, personal communication, April 3, 2014).

Kerry believed that the attention and care that his teacher gave him allowed him the opportunity to excel in school. Since his teacher knew how he learned best, he believed that she cared for him, and as a result, he felt more comfortable in the classroom. This family-type atmosphere was also a benefit to his learning because it created a learning environment that encouraged him to take risks. Knowing that he had support from his teacher and classmates encouraged Kerry to step up his game in all areas of his life.

Participants in this study expressed that they felt an obligation to care for the students at Freedom Academy. They believed that love was the backbone of their relationship with students. Teachers believed that demonstrating love and care to the students would secure trust with students and motivate students to learn. One teacher stated,

I show that I care by spending extra time with my students. I point out their specific gifts and I am explaining how school is important and I try to explain to them how they can use their gift. These students are really smart, but they don't have those examples at home. They don't know how to use their gift in the world. I find out when I sit with them they are more willing to listen. This environment and where the kids come from are rough. I think it is important that we provide a lot of love that they might not receive at home. I try to give them attention, and I notice when I show them attention, they work for me. (T. Miller, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Throughout this study, I have found that in an effort to provide a safe and secure learning environment, participants were caring individuals who developed relationships with the

children and their families. It was also important to build a community that provided trust and a sense of understanding of the circumstances that the families were walking through.

It Takes a Village

The Nigerian proverb, “It takes a whole village to raise a child,” is a component of the African worldview that highlights the importance of family, relationships, service, and self-sacrifice for community members (Healey, 2004). Freedom Academy has an annual operating budget of \$1.9 million dollars, and the majority of the annual income comes from individual donors. Donors and foundations contribute \$1, 538,183 per year. The Academy understands that they cannot survive or accomplish the mission of advancing the gospel by educating urban youth (*Annual Report, 2013*) without the support of individual donors. The director of development notes that the best way to get more donors is to get them on campus. She states,

One of the things that I have discovered is that donors start by tutoring. That is how people really get engaged. When they come on campus and experience the kids and see the atmosphere. We have to work hard at giving people the opportunity to get involved. We are 100% backwards in our income model. Every other school is tuition based and we are not. In addition to that, every other school targets alumni and parents to be donors. We have neither that really donate. We will have alumni in the future, but we don’t have that right now. The challenge for us is to get people engaged. We are looking for individuals who believe in what we do and that is our donors. Not foundations or companies, but people who believe in our mission and want to help. (E. Andrews, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

The real difference at Freedom Academy is how the various donors and volunteers get involved. Businesses and churches provide mentors, and volunteers come and speak at chapel and career week. Individuals will come and help the teacher with academic prep

and hallway decorations. These are the villages that help raise the students at the Academy (Donvoan, et al., 2013). One participant explained,

The scholarship donor is the meat of our donorship. We have some people that do two scholarships a year. So, \$12,000 for each child is where the best bang for the buck is. It is interesting; if the donor has the means and they are serviced-minded, believe in our mission. It isn't a hard at all. People who have a lot of means like that, well it is a matter of educating them with what we do, and helping them become emotionally involved in what we do. (E. Andrews, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

While answering phones, I observed the Freedom Academy president speak to a woman who said, "I have two children that are enrolled in private schools. I should have two at your school." The women then asked how much it cost to attend the Academy, and the next day there was a check for \$26,000 in the mailbox. Individual scholarship donors believe that they are showing the ethic of care by sacrificially providing the funds needed to send urban youth to a Christian day school. Participants believed that one way to break the poverty cycle in America was to give students an equal opportunity for a prestigious education.

In this study, the president and director of development were adamant about creating opportunities for engagement. When asked to describe the process of finding donors. The president of the Academy noted,

We try to create engagement for different types of people. For example we have a social at Monday Night Brew. This will be for our 20-to-30 year-old supporters and they will leave that night with knowledge of how to support us. They can support us by prayer, volunteering, or giving money. In April we are having something similar for older donors. We get twelve tables of ten, and at each table you have two donors and two students. Each donor will host a table, and invite six friends. The six friends will leave the event knowing how to support us. This is how we cultivate donors (E. Peter, personal communication, March 5, 2014).

I had the pleasure of attending and collecting money at one of the fundraising events. During the fundraiser at Monday Night Brew about 150 people came to the event to learn about Freedom Academy. Each person paid ten dollars to get into the event and was provided one free beer and dinner from a local restaurant. The event was geared to younger donors who are called “Friends of the Academy.” Around 8:00 p.m. the president of the school came up and introduced himself, the teachers who were in attendance, and the PTO president. After the introductions the president showed a three-minute video and announced the mission of the Academy, which is to educate and equip students for the future while glorifying Christ (*Annual Report, 2013*). He noted that the students would leave the Academy knowing who they are, whose they are, and with the skills to be able to go to the next level. The president ended his speech by telling the people in attendance that they needed their help and urged the group to pray for the Academy, and donate with their time or money. A donor and board member offered a unique story that reflected a deep expression of faith, and the importance of having these fundraising events. He stated,

Someone invited me to a fundraiser and I saw a video of the Academy and I just looked at it and I said I want to be a part of that. I don’t care what I have to do. It doesn’t matter if I have to sweep the floors. It was like all of these God things. So I met the president and the dean and told them that I wanted to be involved (G. Lynn, personal communication, March 4, 2014).

Donors are the heart and soul of Freedom Academy, and having specific events to provide engagement shows how the Academy worked hard to build relationships within the community.

Noddings (1992) notes that to truly implement care-ethics and make room in our hearts to care for someone else means to die to self and our individual situations. When asked how the donors demonstrated the ethic of care one participant stated, “Well, I mean some of it is simple because they give sacrificially. Twelve thousand dollars a year is a lot of money to someone that they don’t know. That is huge. Then, the ones that are donors and volunteers help by giving of their time to the teachers” (E. Andrews, personal communication, February 25, 2014). One donor showed how he sacrificially opened up his home to two former students. He noted,

Students who go here that I am involved with want to learn. Two of our former students live with us. They received scholarship to a private school in Alpharetta. I wanted them to go to this school, but knew that they wouldn’t be able to attend because of location. My wife and I decided that they could live with us during the week. It was cool. I took them to school every day. What was so cool is that they were given this incredible opportunity to receive this education, and I wanted to be able to help them get that education. I have a friend and we were taking about civil rights. He told me that the issue did not end when they signed the Civil Rights Act. I asked how we could make this better. He said that every person has to take responsibility to do his or her part. So, this was my part. Taking these two girls to school and allowing them to live with us was my part (G. Lynn, personal communication, March 4, 2014).

A person, who embodies care ethics, is attentive to others. Noddings (2012) describes the caring approach as; treat others the way you would like to be treated. However, she continues to show the importance of educating and enhancing the capacity for empathy. Mr. Lynn believed that he was modeling and demonstrating how to care by allowing two former students to live at his house while they attended high school. It is not unusual to see or hear about donors and teachers allowing students to live with them for a while. Participants had close relationships with the parents and viewed this as a ministry to better the community. The students at Freedom Academy felt safe with the teachers and

have stated that they have personal relationships with each teacher and staff members.

When teaching empathy it is important to understand what the person who is being cared-for is going through.

Caring for Students

Providing a caring learning environment for students is an important piece of the puzzle when talking about closing the achievement gap (Roberts, 2000). Noddings (1995) notes that when children feel cared-for, their overall attitude about school is enhanced. In this study, the participants felt called to care for and develop personal relationships with the students at the Academy. Participants described how they developed personal connections with their students, and showed the ethic of care. Teachers stated,

I am really good at listening and I want my students to know that they are heard. That is really important to me. I want them to fully understand that I acknowledge them, that I understand that they got their feelings hurt and that I care about them as individual people (B. Brown, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

So as far as caring, well right away if I see a kid that is down, I just take them to the side and say, hey, what is wrong? Is everything okay? Our kids, well we have such a relationship with them that it is not like why is my teacher asking me this. It is normal for them to have them and be concerned. That is one way that I show that I care (K.Lewis, personal communication, April 1, 2014).

I am honest with them. I tell them things about my childhood pasts. I told them things that occur about being a teacher. When they tell me something, I keep it to myself. We talk and pray together, and I treat them with the respect that they need. I tell them that I am a woman of my word. I also see them as my own, I want that type of relationship with them. I hug them and I try to make sure I make a connection about a game, movie, a book, some type of personal connection. It is important that I understand them as individuals. It is also important for me to speak into them. You speak into people what you want them to become. A lot of them don't hear it, they hear the negative. I want them to hear a positive. When they hear the positive, they will respond. The more you speak it, the more they react, the more they become. (D. Ann, personal communication, January 25, 2014).

These participants believed that developing personal relationships and showing their students that they cared would increase academic development in the classroom. Also, the participants expressed that it was important to get to know each student on an individual basis. Noddings (2002) expands on the idea of developing a personal relationship with each student because each student in the class might need different forms of care. One participant expressed how she saw a need to include physical education into the curriculum. She stated,

One way that I care and make connections with the girls in the Academy is through Girls on the Run. The girls would always complain to me about walking, and I knew we needed something for fitness at our school. My mom mentioned Girls on the Run, and I went to a workshop, and I was like, this is cool, and I just kept going with it. It gives the girls an opportunity to know me outside of the classroom, and it is a great way to minister to their specific need. It is so neat for me to build a relationship outside of the classroom, and the most exciting aspect of this program is when we go back into the classroom. The girls want to work for me. I think it is because they know me and we bond over running. We really bond, and I can tell they are putting a ton more effort in my math class because we can connect (K. Lewis, personal connection, April 1, 2014).

Ms. Lewis explained that Girls on the Run is a program for girls in the 3rd–through 8th grades, and she believed that Girls on the Run was a form of caring because it allowed her students to connect with her outside of the classroom. One student stated,

Ms. Lewis really cares about us. Not only does she teach us math, but also she does Girls on the Run with us. With Girls on the Run we go out to the field two days a week and talk about life and relationships. After we get together and do our lesson, she takes us out for a run. I have really learned how to think and act with integrity. Ms. Lewis is such a mentor and because of this program we all know that if we choose or decide to tell her something, she would sit down and try to talk and help us (S.Simm, personal communication, April 21, 2014).

Ms. Lewis teaches life skills through running and an interactive curriculum, and at the end of the year, Ms. Lewis took the girls to celebrate by running a 5k together. Her goal

was not only to give her students confidence while introducing physical activity into her students' lives, but also teaching them how to care about themselves and others.

Teaching How to Care

Gilligan (1982) defines the ethic of care as treating others as of equal worth, "that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt" (p.63). Caring schools are environments where students feel safe to express their differences (Noddings, 2006). Caring schools also demonstrate and teach students how to care for others. Nagy (2012) notes that students will only become caring people if they are explicitly taught how to care.

Participants believed that they taught the ethic of care in different ways. During my observations and interviews with the students, they always expressed the Academy as their family. One participant explained that she teaches students how to care for others by teaching that they are family. She explained, "I say we are a family, and we may not get along all the time, but we are still a family" (K. Lewis, personal communication, February 25, 2014). During observations, I noticed that if a student would get an answer correct, everyone would cheer and tell that student good job. In one specific observation, I noticed two students helping each other out with a spelling center. After center time, the student who was being helped turned to the other student and said, "Thanks for being a good friend to me." When asked how she taught those characteristics in her classroom, the teacher responded,

I think the biggest thing is pointing out with my students when they are being a good friend or respectful. We started the year reading this book called *The Bucket Filler*. This book explains how there is a theory about how everyone has a bucket. I tell my 1st graders that you can fill that bucket with kind words and kindness or you can dip into someone's bucket and that means that you are being mean. I explain to them that it means you are literally taking something out of someone's bucket and putting it in yours. We talked about it for a while, and I read that book to them once a week for two months. It really stuck with them, and it is a visual because you are literally taking something away from someone else. We also read the book that had little paper hearts. I give them all paper hearts and we crinkle them up. I explain that when someone was mean to them they crinkled the hearts and when someone was nice they undid the heart. The point was that the crinkles were still there. It was permanent on them. So we just did a lot of talking and discussing. It is really important that I also sit and talk with them if they are having a bad day. I will ask what is going on. Now I notice that they ask each other that. For example, we have a student who just lost his mother and one way that my 1st graders show that they care is by coming up to him and asking him if he is okay. They learned how to care for him because we made a point to teach that in the beginning of the year (B. Brown, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Noddings (2002) believes that students learn how to care by first being cared for.

However, she goes on to state that when one is affirmed in the act of caring, they then learn that they must care. Affirmation is to bring out the best in a person. These participants believed that their students mattered and were uniquely gifted. One former student believed that the Academy taught her to care because they celebrated small and big events in everyone's lives. She stated,

We have this thing at chapel that each grade has to lead, and to see the little kids lead is amazing. We want to cheer for them when they lead and that is how the Academy shows us to care. We should encourage and build people up. Also, we celebrate everything even small things. Everyone wants to encourage each other. At chapel we have time where you can go up and tell people what you are thankful for and to brag on others. It is really neat to do that, and it makes you happy when someone recognizes something you did. We always know what everyone is doing, when the 8th graders are applying to school everyone knows. We always get updates, and then share the information with everyone. We want to everyone to do well, and when someone messes up, we are still open because we can trust people here. We don't judge anyone because we just tell them that they

can change whatever. We just care for everyone because that is what has been taught here (A. Vick, personal communication, January 25, 2014).

Teachers believed in providing a safe learning environment that allowed students to feel confident and secure in the classroom. Noddings (2002) believes that “if we want children to learn how to be cared for, so that eventually they will have the capacity to care for others, we must make it a primary goal of schools to care for them” (p.28). Participants in this study provided care and taught students how to care by incorporating literature into the curriculum, pointing out when someone was being respectful or kind, celebrating small events, and creating meaningful partnerships with their students’ families.

Caring for Parents

Caring schools are made up of nurturing individuals who care about the whole child and the overall wellbeing of a student’s life. Caring schools want to know about their students’ families and partner with them to help prepare the child they share. Epstein (2002) states that when families are involved as partners in their child’s school, their child will achieve academically, have better behavior, less absences, and have an overall positive attitude about school. For a school to get to know their students and families, they need to encourage shared responsibilities of institutions (Epstein, 2011). This model emphasizes collaboration and communication between the school and the parent. During a focus group with a group of teachers, I asked about how they cared for parents. They responded,

I can easily say this child is not doing her work because the parent is so bad and blame it on the parent. You can get that attitude, and say I am just going to do

what I can and then move on, but um, it is my belief because we do give ourselves to the things of God because we teach Jesus we can use that to talk to parents very honestly. The parent sees that I am not attacking them, but I am trying to understand and sometimes I don't really understand, but I look past and I see where the parent is, and I look at the child who has no choice. You can't make an adult be who they need to be for them. So I have to bring the parents along with me. I say, you have a brilliant baby, and then they just open up and they start sharing... They don't know. I have to give them strategies and suggestions. I have to make it easy for them. Time is very important for my parents. They look at homework as useless, and all of those things that I hear. So, I have to teach the parents time management. Think about a parent who gets off at 5:00 and it takes her 30 minutes to get here. Homework is the last thing she wants to think about. I have a rule, Pre K will not do homework in aftercare, and they have to do it at home. Mom has to be involved because I need her to see their learning, their struggles, and their strengths so she can be a part of their learning, and build on my foundation. They all come in here and fuss about that rule. I have to educate them on the whys and I have to educate them and show them time management, and why it should not take that long. I expect ten minutes. It is something that they have seen that day, and I show the parents how to do their homework with their kids. All I want is ten minutes every day. I tell them that they can do this while they are fixing dinner. I tell them to go to the dollar store and let them play with letters. I have to teach them strategies because they do not know how to help their child (S.Simmons, personal communication, April 14, 2014).

In another interview, a teacher stated,

I have to tell them and educate the parents. I tell them don't take your hands off your students because this is just as important. This year we gave them a book by Steve Perry. He talks about things that parents need to do. It is like an education audit. He has a check list and asks: do you have a place for them to do homework? Things like that. We need them to help support their child in that way. What messages are you giving the child that education is important? When we get to conferences it is tough love for them. (L. Stan, personal communication, February 5, 2014).

This school cared enough about their students to give up their time and educate their families. They held parent nights, took the time to visit parents at their homes, helped with childcare, allowed students to stay at their house during the week, bought the families food, and helped with the high school application process. By collaborating and involving the families, teachers were able to adapt their lessons to their students' needs. In one observation, I noticed how a parent was having trouble helping their child with his

homework. The teacher took time afterschool to bring the parent in and modeled how to complete the math homework. The teacher also gave specific examples for the parent.

This school believed that by trying to meet their families' emotional and physical needs ultimately helped and enabled their students to be more productive in the classroom. One participant expressed,

Because it is so small and because the numbers are small you not only get to know the child, but the families. You get to know the expectations of the parents and you get to know what goes on in the house. The teacher has to prepare and work with the student no matter what, and even when they have rough environments at home. All students don't learn the same so that is why it is really important to involve the families in the education process. We know the parents and care for them too. I really try to encourage them and give them advice. They are working so hard to make it and provide the best that they can for their child. I really try to support them when they are discouraged. I just want to serve the parents and help them learn how to help their child at home (M. Faith, personal communication, April 5, 2014).

Knowing the parent and the families allowed Freedom Academy to truly make personal connection with their students. Not only was the Academy able to care for their students, but by engaging and collaborating with their families, this school helped establish curriculum that will enhance their students' learning by incorporating students' culture into the lesson-planning process.

Using Culture as an Asset Motivates Students

Culturally relevant pedagogy is founded in critical pedagogy, which is the belief that "schooling" is not unbiased (McLaren, 2009) because it allocates power unfairly and disproportionately to students (Kincheloe, 2004). Critical pedagogy challenges teachers to "point out how historical and pervasive educational practices cause inequitable

opportunities and oppressive conditions for particular groups of students, mostly typically students who live in poverty and students of color” (Rozanksy, 2010, p. 3). Ladson-Billings (1994) states that in order to successfully educate students of color, teachers must teach in a variety of ways that are often different from what they learned in teacher preparation programs. In order to motivate and make personal connections with students, teachers need to draw from students’ lives and be able to justify instructional practices based off of cultural assets that students already bring into the classroom.

Culturally relevant pedagogy utilizes and celebrates student culture while going beyond the “negative effects of the dominant culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 19). The negative effects of schooling are enhanced, for example, by not connecting or seeing one’s culture represented in the curriculum used in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994). By using culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers are empowering students to think critically and generate curriculum that allows students to become aware of social injustice in the world (Esposition & Swain, 2009). Ladson-Billings (1995) states that culturally relevant pedagogy “utilizes students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (p.161). By addressing culture, teachers are allowing students to make personal, meaningful, and relevant connections to the curriculum. Freedom Academy used their students’ culture as an asset and relied on culturally relevant pedagogy to provide meaningful educational opportunities such as civil right tours, college tours, and field trips.

Civil Rights Tours and Field Trips

Teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy have the opportunity to provide students with meaningful lessons that will make learning come to life for their students.

Ladson -Billings (1995; 1994) states that using culture, as an asset in the curriculum will enhance positive learning outcomes for students. The success of using this type of pedagogy ultimately lies in the classroom teacher's hands. Teachers, who are willing to use their students' culture in the classroom, understand who they are, and the power that one's identity plays in the learning experience. Freedom Academy was challenged by the former mayor to make history come to life for their students. The Academy believes that living in the South is an asset to the school. Since the south is so rich in history there are many museums, events, and artifacts that lend to learn history through experiences. The junior high students at Freedom Academy are given the opportunity to partake in three different civil rights and college tours. The goal of these tours is to give the students at Freedom Academy real-life experiences. I interviewed the dean of the school and asked him to explain the purpose of the civil rights and college tours. He stated,

When a kid leaves here my main concern is that they get an experience and understand what it was like to live or be in a civil rights struggle. We combine that with college exposure. What began as a civil rights tour and a black college tour expanded to Duke, UNC, Vanderbilt, Rhodes, and Fisk. It's an incredible experience to go to the Lorraine Motel and Alex Haley's home. They get primary source and first-hand account of history... They get to reflect, understand, and appreciate the contributions that people that lay down their lives, so they can have all of these experiences. Also, going to the colleges gives them a height or something to shoot for. They get to listen to stories about civil rights, they get primary source and first-hand account of history, and they get college exposure (D. Martin, personal communication, March 2, 2014).

In another interview a teacher reported,

The tour really exposes our students to their history in a very meaningful way. They will learn about it in school, but to be able to cross the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma, and for them to know this is where John Lewis and others were marching. To be able to go to Brown's chapel and to see that history, I think it puts it into context. But also touring colleges exposes them to real life college experiences and to be thinking about that as junior high student is amazing. We want them explore what college means, and they might not have a parent who

went to college. Then when we come back they are able to make connections to our lessons. They are also working harder because they have goals. We went to a medical school in Nashville and had medical students talking to our kids about what it takes in order to be successful, and what kind of habits that they need to develop. This is really a life changing experiences. I think it really helps our students put history into context (D. Lynn, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

One student explained in detail about her experience on the tour. She stated,

Staci: I had a great time on the civil rights and college tour. When we got to Memphis, we learned about Martin Luther King Junior. We went to the Lorraine Motel. After we left the museum, we stood where MLK was murdered. I respect the bravery of King who stood up for us.

Kristy: Why do you think that was important?

Staci: It shows us history. We saw history and saw how Alex Hailey lived. It shows us how other people had to do things in order for us to get here.

Kristy: Describe the impact that had on your life?

Staci: It impacted me because it showed me that things are not always easy for people before. They had to do a lot of hard work to get us here now and even now it isn't easy. We should all do something to help the people ahead of us (S. Simms, personal communication, April 25, 2014).

Another student described how the tour motivated her to learn. She stated,

Those trips were really great because in public school we never went anywhere, and it was so boring. Public school didn't really have an influence or impact on my life in anyway. Same thing over and over again. So when we went to DC for the inauguration of Obama it was like we were a part of history. To say that I was there is amazing. The tours were so much fun. We went to so many different places, and a lot of schools don't get to do this. I wanted to come back to school and talk about what I saw on the tours. I was able to understand the importance of what I was learning in a new way (A. Vick, personal communication, January 25, 2014).

The tours not only enable students at Freedom Academy to identify with African-American culture, but it also empowers the students to think critically by using what they learned on the tour as reference points for classroom learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The faculty and staff at Freedom not only believed that students were gaining content knowledge and college exposure while on the tours, but they believed that these tours instilled a sense of responsibility in their students by requiring them to manage money, keep up with their personal belongings, and act responsibly while traveling. The dean reported,

They get to experience what it is to travel and what it is to be on time because they are checking in and out of a hotel. They also get to experience that they have paying customers sleeping in a room next door, so they have to behave and respect others. They understand how to look someone in the eye because they are meeting people everywhere they go. The small things like packing. They are responsible for their things (D. Martin, personal communication, March 2, 2014).

When asked to describe what she or he learned most on the tour, one student reported,

Of course history! Ha! But, people skills. I learned how to act and how to talk to people. I also learned how to travel and how to be on time, and to be responsible for my belongings. I really learned people skills, and how to act in the hotel, and the museums. I guess it taught me how to respect others (A. Vick, personal communication, January 25, 2014).

Teachers at Freedom Academy believed that “if kids can’t see it, they can’t be it” (D. Martin, personal communication, March 2, 2014). Freedom Academy wanted their students to be exposed to learning in meaningful ways. Using culturally relevant teaching allowed students at the Academy to make connections beyond the classroom. This type of pedagogy allowed students to become a community of learners, or as the students at the Academy call themselves, a family. Teachers believed that they had to build on their students’ background knowledge and cultural experiences in order to bridge the achievement gap between their students. A former teacher at Freedom Academy explained how project-based learning was started.

I can still remember the name of our textbook, *Build Our Nation*, and it was obviously all about American history. For the first month I realized that the context that my kids had, my 5th-graders, was so not what it needed to be. You know we are introducing things to these kids and they don't have a visual or any background knowledge at that point and I didn't have any technology. I brought my own computer and it was really hard for me to bring that alive for my students. That is when I decided to take the kids to DC I was like okay y'all, we need to pretend that we are going to DC and at that point I didn't have the funds. I was sending letters out to raise money. I started the kids with the question phase. I had them design a map of the city and then drawing the important things. We started out drawing the Capitol, the National Mall, and then the monuments, and we went from there. I used the history book as an additional text, but not the main text. We went through way more using this approach. They had to write and I can remember that I gave them a place and they had to research it. I told them that they were going to pretend that they had to lecture as a tour guide. I ended up raising all of the money and we got to go. It was amazing. I planned a huge and intense schedule and the students had the time of their life. Any field trip that we do is a cool experience where they get to learn outside of the classroom. To have experiences that they can talk about is great, and they get opportunities that if they weren't here they probably wouldn't have gotten (M. Jones, personal communication, May 1, 2014).

This participant was passionate about building bridges from experiences to the classroom. Rather than expecting her students to have the background knowledge when they came into the class, this teacher helped build schema and provided opportunities for students to make connections by organizing field trips. This participant believed that she did not have to be the same race as her students to be able to educate them, but she did note that she had to provide empathy and understand her students' cultural assets to be able to successfully educate her students.

Curriculum

Although Freedom Academy has formal curriculum, teachers were allowed the freedom to use a variety of pedagogical practices and approaches. According to Short, Lynch-Brown, and Tomlinson (2014) when a student can identify with a character in a

novel or textbook their desire, motivation, and interest will increase. For example, when asked how she incorporated culture into her daily lesson, a teacher stated,

I am intentional about reading books that are written by African-Americans or address African-American culture. My kids are really interested in those types of books. I also find books that they can relate with. When we are studying the Great Depression I specifically found books that dealt with African Americans. When I first introduced to the book *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, it was the same year as the Martin trial. I would bring connections with the trial and ask what role does race still play? They brought it up because they have been to trips with us like Alabama, Tennessee, and North Carolina. They are exposed to these things and it is getting them to point where they are thinking about it and using higher-order thinking, and then be able to discuss it. I want them to be able to relate not only as an African American, but also as a Christian. What is our response as a Christian? We try to bring it all together for them. First of all when we are talking about African American history we are talking about American history. I want to help them make that connection. Sometimes they don't care about it now, but they will later. This might be the only opportunity that they have to do this. Many of our kids end up going to schools where they are the minority. I think two things we have to do is get them grounded and have the confidence of who they are (K. Gainey, personal communication, May 1, 2014).

The small classes in the program enabled teachers to have rich discussion and encourage students to “choose academic excellence” (Ladson -Billings, 1995). In one of the classrooms I observed, the teacher focused a great deal on African-American art and allowed her students to recognize their own personal gifts. Mrs. Millie challenged her students to demonstrate academic power by building on topics and concepts that they found relevant. When asked to describe how she implemented culture into the curriculum she stated,

For example, in 6th grade we are doing Romare Bearden. So, I will get something that is related to African-American history. This will allow students to see where they come from. To see the music and the arts and to see how African Americans really struggled and how much and how far they have come. They all had so many amazing gifts and talents and they were never allowed to use them. It is really neat to see how they move past their struggles. I want my students to

understand how they can use their gift (T. Millie, personal communication, February 2, 2014).

Mrs. Millie found ways to value her students' skills, gifts, and talents. This type of learning allowed Mrs. Millie to build on and enhance learning by using her students' culture as a starting block for learning. Participants believed that it was important to establish a culture of caring by understanding that their students face overwhelming challenges that many students do not have to face. Using culturally relevant pedagogy allowed students at Freedom Academy to succeed in the classroom.

Summary

Freedom Academy combined Christian worldview with care ethics and culturally relevant pedagogy in an effort to close the achievement for their students compared to students from affluent areas. Freedom Academy integrated a Christian worldview by demonstrating the gospel through community service. Teachers at the Academy felt called and were able to freely integrate their faith into the curriculum. Teachers, staff members, and donors demonstrated the ethic of care by providing funds, giving up their time, making personal connections with their students, teaching their students how to care, and educating and creating a trusting environment where parents felt secure and welcomed.

Freedom Academy also used culturally relevant pedagogy in their lessons through project-based learning, field trips, civil rights, and college tours. Students were taught to think critically as they saw themselves in the Arts and language arts curriculum. The

overlap of the themes created a trusting environment where students felt safe to take risks and reported an overall genuine love for the school.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

Poor neighborhoods usually have a higher volume of traffic, higher incidences of crime, and unkempt playgrounds; therefore, these communities have far less green space compared to well-off neighborhoods (Jensen, 2009). As a result, low-income communities are more likely to have lower-quality local services. (NCTAF, 2004). Even though most children report their childhood experiences as a worry-free time in their lives, children living in low-income communities have a tendency to spend their time stressed over how to survive in the world, and far less time exploring the opportunities that the world has to offer. Kumanyika and Grier (2006) report that low-SES students have limited access to literature, limited exposure to the library, and often spend more time playing video games and watching TV compared to middle-class children. Students from poverty need consistent adults in their lives who offer structure. Without a reliable caregiver, students are more likely to become stressed and have negative view of life and school (Evans & English, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to explore the culture of an urban Christ-centered day school. By using a critical ethnographic lens for my study, I was able to identify how Freedom Academy integrated a Christian worldview, used the ethic of care, and implemented culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum. I saw that the faculty and staff went above and beyond to meet their students' academic, behavioral, and emotional needs. They used culturally relevant pedagogy to represent African-American culture as

well as field trips to important historical sites to make learning more personal, meaningful, and relevant for each student. In this chapter, I discuss the most noticeable findings from the study and then identify their importance. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of how this project changed my perspective and worldview, a reflection of the limitations, and discuss future research opportunities that will result from this study.

Review of Findings

In the United States, the current focus on education is based off of standardized tests and their implications for school reform. However, the participants in this study seemed to understand the answer to this simple question. “If life experiences can change poor kids for the worse, can’t life experiences also change poor kids for the better” (Jensen, 2009, p. 17)? To accomplish the bigger picture of education and regain focus on the moral purpose of education, Freedom Academy addressed and took care of the whole child, including the academic, social, spiritual, emotional, and personal needs of each student. Through qualitative data analysis, I was able to answer my research questions.

How Has the Faculty and Staff at Freedom Academy Included a Christian Worldview into their Curriculum?

The purpose of a Christian day school is to glorify, reflect, and demonstrate Christ (Dockery, 2009). This demonstration of faith is authentic, genuine, and requires attention to taking every thought captive towards Christ (Sproul, 1992). This means that a Christ-centered school cannot only focus on chapel services and the teaching of the Bible. True

integration of faith and learning happens when students are capable of understanding how the Christian faith shapes their decision process and worldview (Harris, 2004).

Through this study, I discovered that Freedom Academy's Christian worldview shaped every decision that the Academy had to make. Freedom Academy understood their identity as a Christ-centered day school, and was able to put the morals of Christianity into practice. For example, the participants in this study did not separate their faith from their scholarship. Rather, they fully integrated it in every aspect of the school. This process began with the mission of the school, which was to advance the gospel by educating urban youth (*Annual Report, 2013*). Freedom Academy intentionally sought out ways to demonstrate the gospel through community service activities. Students at the Academy understood the concept of paying it forward, and chose to serve others because of their genuine love for Christ. By implementing their mission statement, Freedom Academy intentionally combined Christ-like thinking and service. As cited in Evans (1987) Bernard of Clairvaux stated,

Some seek knowledge for
The sake of knowledge:
That is curiosity;
Others seek knowledge so that
They themselves may be known:
That is vanity;
But there are still others
Who seek knowledge in
Order to serve and edify others:
And that is charity.

By demonstrating the gospel and serving others, Freedom Academy believed that the core of the Christian worldview was to help and edify others.

Faculty, staff, and donors felt called to work at the Academy and saw it as their ministry. They inquired about the lives of their students and made an effort to see their parents through the eyes of Christ. Freedom Academy built a community of faith by modeling Christian virtues and serving parents with grace and love. Bonhoeffer (1954) encouraged believers in Christ to serve and view others with Christ's eyes. The Academy showed spiritual love by modeling and emphasizing joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Sproul, 1992). Participants believed that they integrated their faith by providing a caring mentor to their students. They befriended their students and took an interest in building specific relationships with them while recognizing their students' strengths and encouraging them to find their God-given gift. Faculty also integrated their faith explicitly by teaching from the Bible once a day and holding weekly chapel services where the students could take part in corporate worship. According to the participants, reading the Bible and attending chapel motivated them to strive for their personal excellence in the classroom and in life.

How do the Teachers, Staff, and Donors at Freedom Academy Demonstrate Caring?

Many urban youth do not receive appropriate care (Jensen, 2009) or understand what it means to be cared for, and as a result, they never cultivate the ability to care (Noddings, 2002). Noddings (2005) believes that in order to care for others, one must first be cared for. True demonstration of care is genuine, authentic, and requires attention to be focused away from the caregiver and full devotion given to the cared-for (Noddings, 2002). Throughout this study, I determined that the saying "it takes a village to raise a child" was an appropriate proverb to describe Freedom Academy. Faculty, staff, and

other stakeholders showed their care in a variety of ways. The participants in this study believed that the scholarship partners or donors were the core of Freedom Academy. Donors are individuals who support Freedom Academy financially. Scholarship partners demonstrated the ethic of care by giving sacrificially and “adopting” a student while they were at the Academy. In addition to providing scholarship money, many partners volunteered in the school as tutors and mentors for the students at the Academy.

Faculty and staff demonstrated the ethic of care by providing a safe and secure learning environment while building a rapport with each individual and providing a positive, low-risk environment that encouraged respect from all students. Freedom Academy stressed to their students, that they were a family and modeled the ethic of care by creating and cultivating personal relationships with each individual. Faculty at Freedom Academy understood that each child learns differently and took the time after school to provide two opportunities for tutorial. Participants in this study took an interest in the students at the Academy and provided extracurricular activities to promote physical and emotional health. According to the participants, the connections that the faculty created increased student motivation in the classroom and helped engage families in the importance of being involved in their child’s school.

Establishing a welcoming environment for the parents was of the utmost importance for Freedom Academy. Faculty and staff viewed parents as partners and took every opportunity to help serve and educate the families on ways to help their children at home. Epstein (2011) states that when parents and schools act as partners with continual and consistent communication, true overlap between family and schools will develop. Overlap between school and family partners increases student learning and motivates a

child to act more responsibly in school (Epstein, 2006). Freedom Academy valued what parents were doing at home and offered parent nights, book studies, seminars, and teacher conferences to support parents in raising their children.

What Role Does Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Play in the Curriculum at Freedom Academy?

Teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy empower students to think critically as they reflect on their culture and cultural assets. Ladson -Billings (1998; 1995; 1994) notes that culturally relevant pedagogy can help close the achievement gap for students who are labeled at-risk. Educators who successfully implement culturally relevant pedagogy are able to recognize who they are as individuals, understand the significance of their own identity, and how their view of culture impacts their choice of instructional strategies (Maye, 2011). Culturally relevant pedagogy helps students identify with the curriculum in a meaningful way, and as a result, students are able to make connections with what they are learning which deepens their understanding of specific concepts (Ladson -Billings, 1994).

Faculty and staff at Freedom Academy were aware of the cultural assets their students brought into the class and integrated this knowledge into their curriculum. By addressing civil rights, culture, and race, teachers were able to plan and use instructional strategies that met their students' diverse needs. Teachers modified their supports while differentiating their instruction based on their students' cultural contexts (Lynn, 2014). The students at Freedom Academy felt safe to openly discuss race and connect their personal interest to specific lessons that they were learning in their classes. Not only did

students read literature written by African Americans and study the culture of African-American history through the lens of art, but they were also able to participate in project based learning and take part in civil right tours.

Faculty, staff, and donors were able to bring history to life by allowing students the opportunity to take part in three different civil rights tours throughout junior high. Allowing students to experience the civil rights and college tours were important to Freedom Academy because these tours were an opportunity for students to see how people who lived before them had to fight for the freedom that they are experiencing today. However, the tours also allowed students to understand that there is still a struggle with racism in the current society. Students were able to talk and discuss with their teachers and mentors about how to respond to these issues with a Christian perspective. Exposing students to colleges was of the utmost importance to the faculty and staff at Freedom Academy. Most of the students who attend Freedom Academy will be first-generation college students. Allowing students the opportunity to tour colleges gave them a motivation and a desire to learn in the classroom. Combining the college and civil rights tours allowed students the opportunity to make connections with their identity and broaden their dreams for the future. Both the college and civil rights tours gave students firsthand experience and allowed them the opportunity to understand their responsibility in advancing the gospel through education and paying it forward.

Allowing the students the opportunity to visit DC and attend the inauguration of President Obama instilled a sense of hope and motivation within the students' lives. One student participant believed that he could be somebody and continually stated that he would not be an ordinary person. He was motivated after visiting DC because he could

see himself in President Obama. Regardless of their students' background knowledge and context for learning, teachers at Freedom Academy found a way to motivate and enhance learning through backward design and field trips.

Using children's literature that enhanced culturally relevant pedagogy was important to teachers at the Academy. When students are able to see themselves in literature and in the art curriculum, they automatically feel more connected to the text and their desire to learn is enhanced (Short, Lynch-Brown, & Tomlinson, 2014). During language arts instruction students would discuss critical issues that they were facing today and connect it to what they were reading. Because the majority of the students from Freedom Academy will be attending predominately white private high schools, the participants believed that it was important to expose students to African-American literature. Exposing students to African-American literature and art allowed students to think critically and identify with the curriculum.

Significance of the Study

Today's school reform exclusively focuses on increasing academic achievement of students (Noddings, 1999), and with the strict accountability that comes from school reform, teacher quality is now at the center of educational policy (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Darling-Hammond (2010) notes, "every school reform depends on highly skilled teachers for its success" (p.1). Teachers are now mandated to be "highly effective teachers" based on student learning evidence and with a Southeastern state turning to tiered certification, teachers will have to be able to justify their instructional practices. Teachers now need to know how to be able to rationalize their instructional practices and refine how they differentiate their instruction to teach more difficult curriculum. This is

especially significant since the diversity of the student body in the United States is becoming more diverse every year (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Compared to other urban schools, Freedom Academy created an atmosphere of learning that focused on the whole child. Freedom Academy developed a curriculum that met the needs of their diverse study body and used the ethic of care and culturally relevant pedagogy as a tool to help deliver instruction to urban students in a way that they could make personal connections to the curriculum.

The idea that Freedom Academy exists and is thriving in an urban setting is significant to this study. As previously mentioned, urban communities do not have many Christian schools. It is not that these students are not capable of learning. Rather, it is that they do not have the opportunity to attend a private Christ-centered day school. Urban students deserve to have the most effective teachers who are prepared and know a variety of pedagogical strategies. Urban children do not have the choice of where they were born, but many of them live in an environment that cannot provide for their basic human needs (Jensen, 2009). Freedom Academy in itself is significant because most of the students that attend the Academy live in a community where the world thinks they cannot be successful and expects them to fail. However, Freedom Academy is a place where these students are expected to thrive (Molina, 2005).

Because Freedom Academy is an urban Christ-centered day school, teachers were expected to teach from a Christian worldview that equipped urban students to look at culture with a Christ-like perspective. In addition to teaching through a Christian lens, Freedom Academy demonstrated the ethic of care. The smaller classes and the intimate community allowed the students to feel like a family. All stakeholders built and

maintained relationships with their students and families. Faculty at Freedom Academy had the opportunity to use culturally relevant pedagogy and incorporated civil right tours, college trips, and used backward design when planning their lessons.

Even though Freedom Academy is a Christ-centered day school, the demonstration of care and culturally relevant pedagogy can be implemented into any school. In addition, a new definition of parent involvement could be developed based off of the findings from this study. Freedom Academy expected their parents to be involved, but viewed this involvement as an authentic partnership. Instead of blaming and demoralizing the parents for the activities that they could not participate in, Freedom Academy empowered the PTO and gave them ownership of four tasks a year. Freedom Academy supported individual families by teaching them specific strategies to help their children at home, offered book studies, held multiple parent nights, and encouraged them to volunteer as much as possible.

As school reforms continue to raise responsibility on teacher preparation programs, faculty will seek new theories on ways to better prepare teacher candidates to serve the diverse populations in urban communities. The ethic of care and culturally relevant pedagogy cannot simply be an extra mandate that teachers need to teach and demonstrate. Instead, these two theories need to be integrated seamlessly throughout the curriculum (Lynn, 2014). In addition to culturally relevant pedagogy and care ethics, teacher preparation programs need to integrate strategies that will allow teacher candidates to develop the skills and character traits necessary to work with a diverse population (Epstein, 2011).

Implications for Educational Policy

Darling-Hammond (2010) notes that improving teacher quality is the most important aspect for improving student academic achievement and closing the achievement gap between urban students. The least effective teachers have traditionally taught urban students. However, with research showing that teachers have the largest effects on student achievement, a focus on policy has shifted on how to better prepare teacher candidates through teacher licensing. Since the diversity of the student body in the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, policy makers have been raising accountability not only at the school level, but now teacher preparation programs are held accountable for teacher effectiveness. edTPA is a national assessment developed by Stanford University (edTPA, 2014). The purpose of edTPA is to create a common tool for assessing teacher candidates and their effectiveness in the classroom. This assessment requires teacher candidates to submit a portfolio based off of three tasks, including teacher candidates justification of how their instructional plans relate to their students' strengths, their background knowledge, and their cultural assets. This assessment will identify teacher candidates who are considered safe to practice on their first day of school (edTPA, 2014).

The Stanford Center for Assessment (SCALE) and edTPA has taken notice of the shift in student population and is giving teacher candidates an opportunity to use culturally relevant pedagogy in portfolios. SCALE has developed an assessment of novice teachers' readiness to enter the teaching fields, makes an important case of what should be included into the curriculum in teacher preparation programs (edTPA, 2014; Lynn, 2014). In the 2013 field test, edTPA noted that 70.3 % of the handbook phrases

and sentence stems “provided teacher candidates with either an opportunity to present CRP elements or prompts to do so” (Hyer, Yee, Carey, & Barnes, 2014, p. 1). In addition, 57.1 % of the sentence stems required teacher candidates to show evidence in their artifacts and commentaries of culturally relevant pedagogy, while, 13.2% of the stems required teacher candidates to summarize and reflect on how they used culturally relevant pedagogy in the edTPA learning segment (Hyer, et al., 2014). Teacher preparation programs and policy makers could learn from Freedom Academy and use the same concepts and strategies that allowed Freedom Academy to integrate the ethic of care and culturally relevant pedagogy into their curriculum. Participants in this study understood the cultural assets their students brought into the classroom and through civil right tours, field trips, and courageous conversations about race and culture allowed students the opportunity to identify with the curriculum.

This nationally based assessment is forcing teacher preparation programs to focus on preparing teachers for teaching in urban schools. Culturally relevant pedagogy and the ethic of care is embedded into all three tasks, and teacher educators are now responsible for teaching teacher candidates how to justify their instruction based off of data, student background, cultural assets, and lived experiences. Teacher candidates must now take into consideration the whole child when developing their learning segment and be able to articulate how this data informed their planning, instruction, and assessment choices (edTPA, 2014).

When educating the whole child, it is important that schools and teachers understand the importance of parental involvement. Regardless of the school setting, all students who attend schools have families. However, all students’ home lives, cultural

assets, and family dynamics are not the same (Epstein, 2011). In essence, it is important that all stakeholders understand the importance of caring for parents especially since the responsibility of student achievement is increasing for the teacher, school, and teacher preparation program. All educators need to have an understanding of the communities in which students live. Without understanding the specific context, teachers and schools are working unaided. Understanding the cultural assets and the contexts of the community will allow schools to collaborate with not only parents, but also communities. “Without partnerships, educators segment students into the school child and the home child, ignoring the whole child” (Epstein, 2011, p. 294). By caring for parents, educators are encouraging children to take ownership of their learning and guiding parents in ways to support their child’s learning, which ultimately leads to increased student achievement (Epstein, 2011).

Reflections and Limitations

“By having the eyes of your heart flooded with light, so that you can know and understand the hope to which He has called you, and how rich is His glorious inheritance in the saints (His set-apart ones), And (so that you can know and understand) what is the immeasurable and unlimited surpassing greatness of His power in and for us who believe, as demonstrated in the working of His mighty strength. (Holy Bible: Amplified Bible, Ephesians.1.18.19)

Throughout this study my sincere prayer was for God to flood my heart with light. It is one thing to read literature that says we have the most imbalanced curriculum in the world (Darling-Hammond, 2006), but to see it with my own eyes has challenged my being to the core. My intended purpose was to voice the whispers of hope of my participants. However, every day that I went to Freedom Academy those whispers turned into shouts. I could not get my participants voices out of my head. This study led me to

an authentic seeking of myself where I reflected on my own values and beliefs. What I learned from the students at Freedom Academy humbled me. Throughout my entire Christian life, I have focused on finding His plan for me. However, walking through life with my participants made me reflect on my values as a Christian. I saw hardships, struggles, and injustices, but I also saw the beauty of endurance. My participants chose to believe and trust in God's goodness. In interviews I was moved to tears as I listened to the whispers of my participants. Their faith was tested, but they believed anyway.

Every day that I traveled to Freedom Academy I was full of emotion. I was irate at the size of the public library. I was heart-broken as I saw students walking to school during the winter with no coats. I was overwhelmed by the poverty and saddened by the amount of trash on the streets. I wanted to make a change, but I did not know where to start or what to do. The question that I wrestled with was how could I bring joy to this community? I find myself in the disciple Peter. I am this disciple who acts before thinking, who foolishly hands out donuts to people walking on the streets with the hope of bringing them joy. I am the disciple that has denied God, who messes up, who is insecure, and feels inadequate to make a change. But Peter was the disciple that God chose to build His church. Peter was the disciple that God commanded to feed His sheep (Davis, 2011). As I look back at my life, I can see the fingertips of God. He was preparing me my whole life for this study. During my time at Kennesaw State University, Jesus shattered my life, broke my body to pieces, and molded it back together more stunningly (Davis, 2011). The people He placed in my life in just the right moments at just the right location, and all of the pain I have faced. I could never imagine that He would entrust me to give a voice to the whispers that are roaring inside my soul.

Limitations

This study provided rich, “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of my participants and their perceptions of the culture of Freedom Academy. Even though I carefully analyzed and reflected on the data, there were many limitations in this study. One limitation to this study was the time. Most ethnographic studies last from one to three years, where I only spent six months at the Academy. Since I had a full-time job, I was only able to observe at the Academy two days a week for six months. Another limitation of this study was my participants’ schedules. Since they did not have a planning period, it was difficult for me to interview every participant without any interruptions. Although I was able to interview faculty, staff, donors, students, alumni, and parents, I would have liked to spend more time with them so I could have a better understanding of their daily lives and the culture of the Academy.

Another limitation might have been that some of the staff members and teachers felt obligated to participate instead of choosing to participate. My goal was for the participants to feel like they could trust me, but at times they may have been fearful to express their true feelings since I was completing research and I was a minority at the Academy. As much as I wanted my participants to observe me as an unbiased person, some participants might have felt that I was evaluating and judging their inadequacies as a teacher or a leader. To overcome this limitation of power, I used member checking and openly communicated with each participant, however I was still concerned that the participants did not fully open up, so perception of power is a limitation.

Future Research

Using a critical ethnographic lens for my study, I simply went in to understand the culture of the Academy. While analyzing the data on the Academy, I saw that the faculty and staff went above and beyond to meet their students' academic, behavioral, and emotional needs. However, the findings from this study show that the faculty needs more professional development and more time to plan. While analyzing my documents I noticed Freedom Academy spends \$43,500 a year on field trips and travel, and \$31,475 a year on miscellaneous expenses, but only \$28,950 a year on staff development and conferences. By listening to the voices of my participants it would be interesting to research and implement a new schedule that allowed opportunities for the teachers at Freedom Academy to have a common planning period. In addition to a common planning period, I think it would be significant to offer the teachers at Freedom Academy professional development opportunities on curriculum and best practices.

I am also interested in combining this study with my work on edTPA. The literature supports that edTPA helps teacher candidates with the self-efficacy and pedagogical skills that a teacher needs to be successful in urban settings (Lynn, 2014). I would like to do future research on teacher perceptions of edTPA and to see if edTPA has increased teacher effectiveness and student achievement in urban schools.

Conclusion

Given the significant jump in diversity in schools today, it is difficult to believe that educators do not see the different cultures of their students. When teachers indicate that they do not see color and ethnicity, they are implying that they do not take into consideration the whole child when they are planning for instruction (Ladson-Billings,

2009). It is my hope that this study will serve as a continuation for courageous conversations about creating equality in our schools systems. Providing urban youth with the opportunity to attend private Christian schools allows students the chance to learn from a Christian worldview. The hope and foundation of critical pedagogy is to equip the oppressed to liberate the oppressors (Freire, 1970). Through the ethic of care and the use of culturally relevant pedagogy, Freedom Academy equipped urban youth with a whisper of hope that they could be successful in redeeming the culture of the community into which they were born. The students of Freedom Academy now have the power to not only free themselves, but also to educate their oppressors. Equipped with the knowledge of how to think with a Christian worldview, the ability to be rooted in love knowing that they are cared for and knowing how to care, and having the opportunity to find themselves in curriculum has given the students at Freedom Academy the ability to change their destinies. The students, their families, and the surrounding community had the opportunity to experience authentic generosity by the faculty, staff, and donors of Freedom Academy. Freedom Academy created an open dialogue where students were able to understand their history. By participating in project-based learning, students understood that they could not amputate their past from their destiny, but they could use their struggles to teach others how to run the race as they champion each other to live boldly and dream. Despite the injustice and the tragedies in my participants' lives, this study showed how one inner-city school empowered students and their families to fight oppression and step out of the prisons that the American culture has created for them.

I truly believe that this dissertation will serve as a stepping-stone to help other inner-city schools learn the importance of caring for parents. I hope to use my

background of edTPA to help prepare teacher candidates and give them confidence on how to use culture as an asset when developing curriculum. In addition to developing curriculum it is important to give teacher candidates opportunities to interact with parents. This study suggested many possibilities for future research. The findings from this study revealed that caring for parents is paramount to student academic success. Building teacher candidates' self-efficacy in the area of parent involvement will ultimately lead to better partnership with families and community members (Epstein, 2011). By listening to the voices of both families and teachers, researchers could develop strategies to support and increase parent involvement in inner-city schools.

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Appendix A

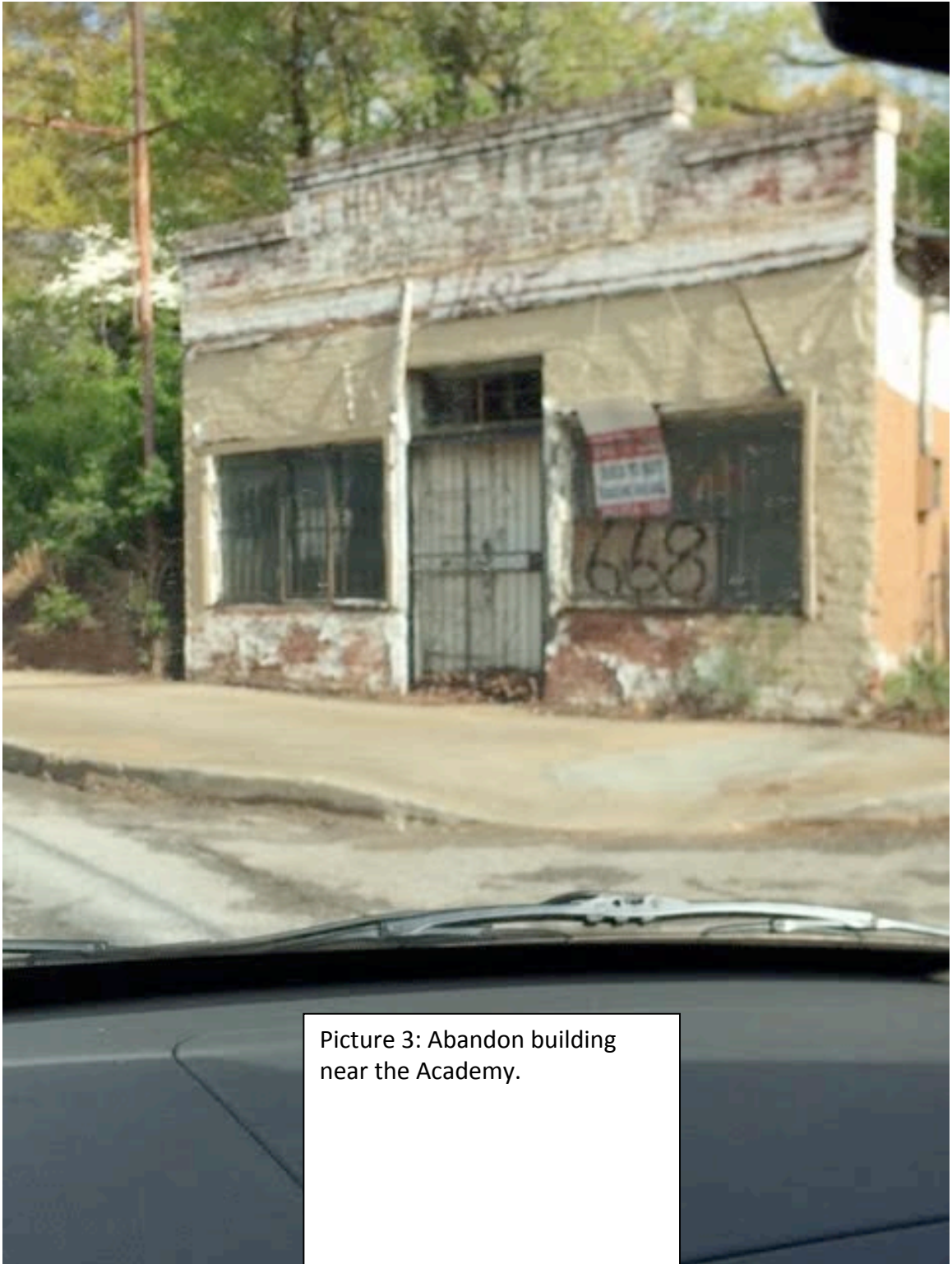
PHOTOGRAPHS



Picture 1: Neighborhood basketball court.



Picture 2: House near Freedom Academy.



Picture 3: Abandon building near the Academy.



Picture 4: Abandon restaurant near the Academy.



Picture 5: Public library.



Picture 6: Federal Penitentiary.



Picture 8: Side picture of the Academy.

APPENDIX B

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Participant	Document Name	Description
M	Registration and Requirements	Application process, teacher recommendations. Parent responsibilities, teacher responsibilities, and student responsibilities. Corporal punishment and attendance policy. Media Release.
M	Uniform Policy	Break down of uniforms and chapel requirements.
M	Intent to return	A document that the parents mark if they plan to attend the Academy next year.
M	Student Handbook	Student responsibilities, honor code, mission and vision statements. Also a page on how the Academy provides counseling to families if they need and request it. Community service hours are required for the student and parent volunteer hours are required. Discipline behavior rules and procedures. Academic responsibilities.
C	Newsletters	Talks about trips and school field trips. Civil right tours.
C	Annual Yearly Reports	Donors and the budget.
E	100 Shares	Information about the Academy that was used for a site visit. This document listed the budget, information on past students, and partnership information.

APPENDIX C

CODE LIST

Caring: Academics
Caring: Advice
Caring: Christian
Caring: Donors
Caring: Parents
Caring: Service
Caring: Students
Caring: Relationship
Caring: Teaching How to Care
Christian worldview: Calling
Christian worldview: Displace
Christian worldview: Gospel
Christian worldview: Explicit
Christian worldview: Implicit
Christian worldview: Presuppositions
Christian worldview: Service
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Civil Rights
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: College Trips
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Curriculum
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Gifts
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Language Arts
Parent Involvement
Academics
Professional Development